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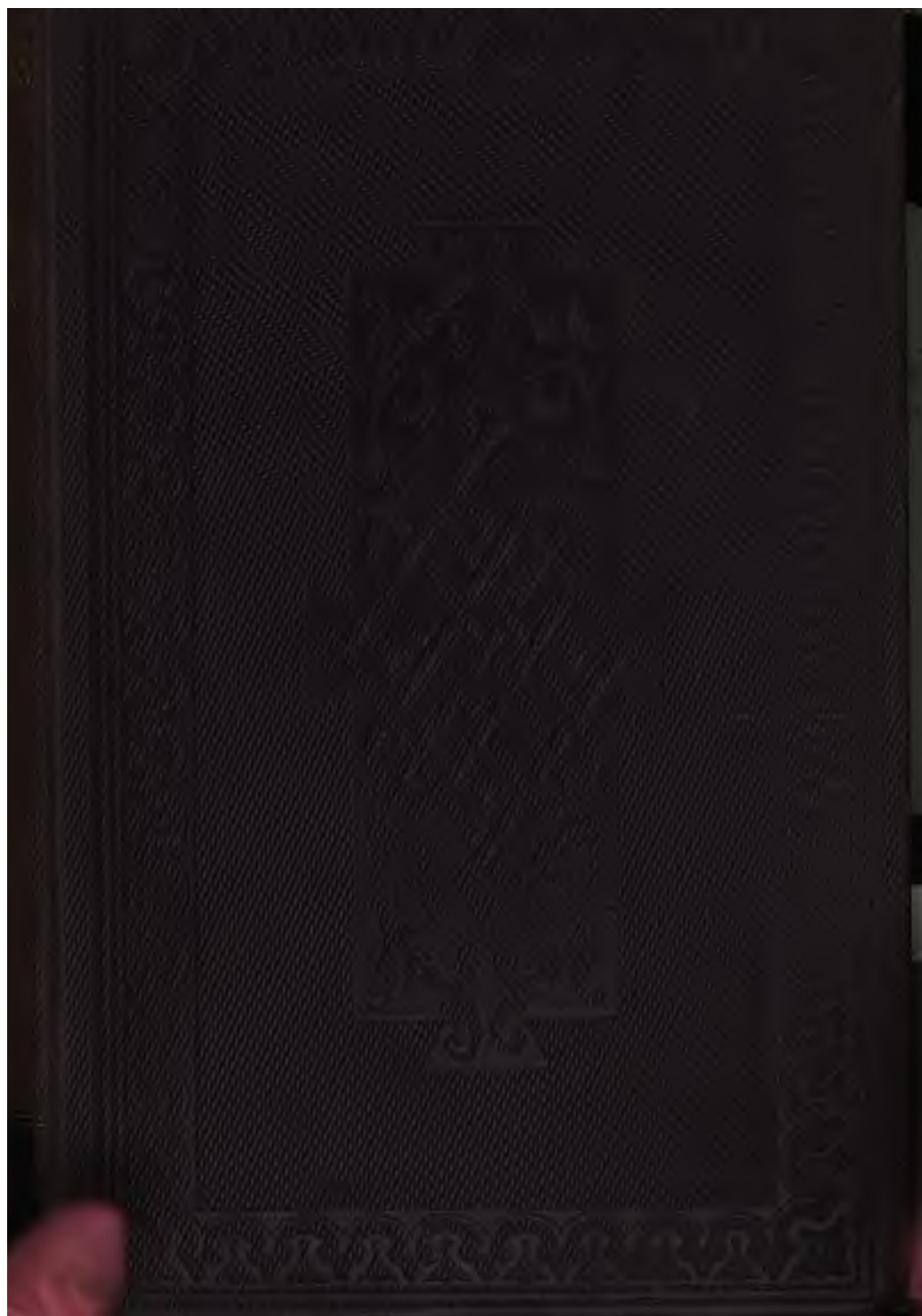
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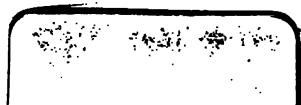




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GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ONE AND TWENTY," "WILDFLOWER,"

"WOODLEIGH,"

&c., &c.

"See what Money can do."

BROOK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
18, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1860.

The right of Translation is reserved.

249. w. 609.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY R. BORN, GLOUCESTER STREET,
REGENT'S PARK.



—

BOOK II.

CONTINUED.

"This lofty dame, with unrelenting soul,
Had a fair girl to govern and control."

CRABBE.

"What can he shew you more
To take you with, than a wild head of hayre;
A very Limebush to catch Lady-birds?
A tissue Doublet; and a Riband shop
Hung in his Hatbands, might set up a Pedler?
Can this maintaine a Lady?"

BROME.



GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY.

CHAPTER XI.

A FENCING MATCH.

By what a wide gulf are we separated from our friends and relations, when we hold to our hearts a secret of which they know nothing. What a distance they are away, the moment we bury that secret within us—bury it deep, deep, press it down with all our strength and cover it with flowers. They know nothing of the spectre which from that grave has sprung up between us, which sits beside us at our table, ever separating us from the loved ones. Their smiles, words,

deeds, are as of old—our laughing looks, the light jest and the careless word, are born of deceit, and are meant for disguise. We have no confidence in them after that, all the past trust withers away like a leaf; we are full of suspicion, and a chance word brings the blood to our cheeks with the fear of betrayal. It is a painful ordeal to pass; those who have not endured it, who have had the courage to tell ALL and brave the worst, are the wisest and happiest.

Alice Tresdaile had not that courage, I thought, for she kept her secret very closely hidden. I had hoped, somewhat vainly, that she would have told her story to me, asked me how to proceed, and not rashly have trusted in herself. I was, in my own opinion, a shrewd little wiseacre, and could, in my own opinion, too, have given her such profitable advice, reasoned her out of much that was rash and precipitate! But Alice made no sign; somehow our old friendly relations together, before Emily Hollingston stepped between us, had nearly all departed. I was not her confidant and best friend now!

Still, I had a right to know her secret, I thought. Andrew was my own brother, and he had proposed to her—was I not sure of that?—and offered her his hand.

And how that brother troubled me, even more than Alice Tresdaile! What secret springs were working at his heart, and ruling actions mysterious to me? What dreams of the future buoyed him up and made of him a visionary, holding forth to his imagination a picture never to be realized? If Alice Tresdaile were in the foreground of that picture, was not the future a delusion to him, a snare to her? I thought of it till the blood rose to my cheeks with shame, and my heart leaped with fear in my bosom. Shame for him and his duplicity if my suspicions were correct, and fear for the weakness of the young and innocent, combined even with the greater fear that Alice might marry him, and wake up to the bitterest truth that ever stung a trusting woman.

But could it be?—was I not deceiving myself? Might not the fragment of the

conversation I had heard last night apply to something foreign to "the tender passion"?—were there not other things beside love to agitate the bosom of Mrs. Tresdaile's grand-daughter? I prayed there might be!

I would find that secret out, not for my own sake, but for Alice's—for Mrs. Tresdaile's. It was the happiness of Alice Tresdaile that I was studying, not thwarting, by so doing; there would be time enough to act, when the reality had risen up before me.

Still, I could not keep my future plans out of my head, they would trouble me and make me thoughtful. Mrs. Tresdaile, who had appeared at breakfast that morning, was quick enough to notice my abstractions—and more than mine, for she exclaimed, with a precipitancy that startled both of us,

"Well, what's it all about?"

Alice and I both coloured and looked up.

"Don't keep it all to yourselves, young ladies," she continued, looking rapidly from one to the other; "I always enjoy the last family news, good, bad, or indifferent. Now, then, please?"

She composed herself to listen.

"Has Miss Alice anything to communicate?" I asked.

"No, no—that is, there is a little news," said Alice, the colour still lingering on her face.

"I suppose you and Miss Bloyce have had a quarrel," said Mrs. Tresdaile; "well, what was it about—me?"

"Oh! no," said Alice, smiling; "Miss Bloyce and I are the best of friends, grand-mamma. Shall I tell you my news?—I'm afraid it will disturb you a little."

"It's about those Hollingston's?"

"Yes."

"Go on—what are they up to now?"

"A few of their friends are now in Hastings, a greater number at Brighton, and Emily is persuading her father to give a little ball at Eversfield Place before they leave."

"They—who?"

"The Hollingstons."

"Why don't you mind your nominative case, then?" said Mrs. Tresdaile; "and

so, the Hollingstons are going to leave?"

"In a week or two."

"Thank God for that little blessing!" ejaculated the old lady, rubbing her hands; "I shall stay in Hastings till Christmas! Good news and bad news close upon each other—we must take the rough with the smooth in this life, Alice. Don't look so dull, you may go to the ball, and Miss Bloyce too, if she likes."

"Thank you, madam," I answered; "I am not very fond of balls."

Mrs. Tresdaile scowled at me from under her grey eyebrows, and I remembered suddenly her conversation of the preceding night, the hints she had dropped, and the wish she had expressed. Still, I had a great objection to grand people, and, moreover, I had not received an invitation, which quite settled the argument, in my opinion, if not in Mrs. Tresdaile's.

"You're too particular, Miss Bloyce," observed the old lady; "*you'll* never get on in the world! You have had a general invitation from the Colonel, so have I, and

if it wasn't for fear of being knocked down by a parcel of clumsy people jumping about, I'd go myself."

I suppose I must have smiled at this, for Mrs. Tresdaile said—

"I don't see anything to laugh at, Miss Bloyce. I've been to many a ball in my young days before I took to Tresdaile and the tobacco business. I have forgotten all my steps, though, and should put my partner out. No, I won't go!"

"Emily has not finally settled on the day, grandmamma. The Colonel is not quite certain when his arrangements will allow of it."

"*His* arrangements!" said Mrs. Tresdaile, with a disparaging elevation of the nose.

"Oh! he is very busy sometimes—travels a great deal, Emily tells me, about England."

"Why, he has got nothing to sell?"

"Nothing to sell, grandmamma," was the reply; "but he attends a great many races, I believe—has a stud of race-horses in London, I have heard."

Races!—stud of horses! I felt myself getting suspicious again. Did Andrew attend a great many races too, make money by betting on horses, as he had spoken of once upon a time? Was gambling the secret of his success? Oh! better to be a poor music-master all his life and struggle for his daily bread, than seek to grow rich by other people's ruin.

"Thinking again, Miss Bloyce?" I heard my mistress say; "well, what makes *you* so thoughtful?"

"Many things, madam," I answered; "my last thought was of my brother. I promised, with your leave, to see him this afternoon."

"He's not coming here?" she cried, alarmed. "I can't see him. It's Saturday—my business day—Bartholomew is coming, Miss Bloyce. I have told you so before half-a-dozen times!"

"I purposed calling at his hotel."

"That's better—that is much better," said Mrs. Tresdaile; "a very sensible suggestion of yours. I suppose he wanted to come here?" she added, sharply.

"No."

"I'm a plain woman, Miss B.," she remarked, "and may as well tell you at once, there's a good deal in your brother I don't like."

"Considering the little you have seen of him, Mrs. Tresdaile," I replied, rather warmly, "is it fair to judge?"

"I arrive at my conclusions very quickly," she replied; "I judged you the first night I saw you, so I did him, and I'm not far out in my estimate. Alice, my dear, you are not looking well this morning, ring for my maid—we'll see about going out."

After we had gone out and returned to an early dinner, I was at liberty to depart in search of Andrew Bloyce. I left Mrs. Tresdaile and her grand-daughter together, and went on my way with a very heavy heart. The coming interview had been before me all that morning, was burning at my brain as I walked on—all was uncertainty and doubt. I had a right to question Andrew, and if he refused to answer me, then there was an end, not to my love for him, but to

my confidence for ever. I felt, with every step I took, how painful was the task I had set myself, how difficult a one to act with proper caution. More than once I hesitated, thinking I was too premature in my resolves ; and then the thought of every precious hour buoying him up with foolish dreams and misleading and deceiving others, nerved me to proceed again.

It was a fine hotel, looking upon the sea, before which I stood making up my mind for the last time. It was not till that mind was decidedly fixed in its intentions that I stepped into the hall and told the first sleeky gentleman I met whom I desired to see.

Gentleman with the napkin thought Mr. Bloyce was engaged, miss, at present, but if I'd step into this room a moment, he'd let me know directly—what name, Miss?

Gentleman with the napkin skated gracefully up a broad flight of stairs almost at the same instant as a gentleman with a stoop came in a very awkward manner down it.

“ Mr. Tresdaile ! ”

"Miss Bloyce!"

"An agreeable surprise, Miss Bloyce," said he, shaking me heartily by the hand and going through his usual anatomical manœuvres.

"This will be an agreeable surprise to Mrs. Tresdaile, too," I replied. "She does not expect you in Hastings till the evening, I think."

"No, perhaps not," said he, carelessly; "but a man must study economy at times, Miss Bloyce. I came down by the cheap train this morning, in preference to the express this afternoon. I have just had the pleasure of an interview with your brother."

"Indeed!"

"A most accomplished young man. With such abilities as he possesses, Miss Bloyce, he ought to make a noise in the world—I believe he will."

"Am I to thank you in my brother's name, Mr. Tresdaile?"

"No, no—your brother is aware of my opinion of him," said Bartholomew; "he

and I perfectly understand each other — perfectly ! ”

Was there a hidden meaning in his words as there was a peculiar intonation in his voice?—I thought so. As he stood before me, doubling up at the end of every sentence and looking so strangely at me from the depths of his small eyes, I could but wonder where lay the spell that drew together two such opposite minds—what thought, or plan, or hope, those minds could have in common ?

“I am not a man of many friends, Miss Bloyce,” said Bartholomew ; “I have not in my course through life encountered many with whom I cared to fraternize. The world is a very hard and selfish world, and when one meets upon it a warm-hearted and unselfish being, its refreshing.”

“Yes.”

Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile would have probably gone on in this strain—a very difficult and unnatural strain for him—for an hour or two, had not the waiter skated down stairs again towards me.

"Mr. Bloyce will be very happy to see you, Miss."

"I am going at once to Mrs. Tresdaile's," said Bartholomew; "have you any commands for me, Miss Bloyce?"

"Not any, thank you."

"Shall I inform her I have met *you* here, Miss Bloyce?"

"Mrs. Tresdaile is aware of my intended visit, sir."

"No doubt, no doubt," he said hastily; "I do not imagine for a moment you would conceal *anything* from Mrs. Tresdaile."

He looked at me so sharply, that he evidently suspected something. Of what was he suspicious? And what plan—for I felt there was a plan—was he following up himself? Why did he—usually so anxious to study Mrs. Tresdaile's wishes—seem, in this instance, to run counter to them, to seek out one to whom his grandmother had some little antipathy, to even inform his grandmother of the new friend he had taken next his heart.

Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile appeared unwilling to part with me; but time was pre-

cious, and the servant was fidgeting about the hall, waiting to lead the way to Andrew's apartments. Bidding Mr. Tresdaile a rather abrupt good-day, I ascended the stairs at last, preceded by the obsequious domestic, who soon ushered me into a handsomely furnished drawing-room.

Andrew was not there, and I was not sorry to be left alone for a few minutes, and think of what I should say to him. Still thinking, and still at a loss, when Andrew entered, came towards me and kissed me affectionately.

"Welcome, Barbara, to my bachelor's quarters," said he; "you are late, dear. I was afraid you were not coming."

"I hope I have not disturbed you and your friend, Andrew?"

"What, Mr. Tresdaile?" he replied; "oh! no, *my friend* had bidden me adieu when your arrival was announced. He's an odd stick, but a well-meaning fellow, Barbara."

"Perhaps so."

"Surely you have no cause to doubt him?"

"I have cause to think he is deep and calculating—too much a man of the world for Andrew Bloyce."

"He must be deep, then," said Andrew, egotistically, "to deceive me! He is a man, Barbara, whose friendship is worth cultivating, despite his oddities; there is no deceit in him—on the contrary, he plays a simple game, and shows his hand too much."

"What game?"

"Oh! the curiosity of woman!" cried Andrew; "how it will dive to the lowest depths to see what lurks 'neath the waters. Come, confess, Barbara, curiosity has led you hither to-day?—curiosity about me, my style of living, my means?"

"No, Andrew," I replied, more seriously; "something more than curiosity has drawn me hither."

"What is it?"

"Fear!"

"Fear for my future?" said he, with a laugh; "why, what a timid bird it is, still to alarm itself about my prospects. Barbara,

they are fair enough," he cried, seizing my hands in his own; "every day but makes them brighter; a few weeks or a month, and I will draw the curtain myself, and show the fair landscape lying beyond in the sunshine. I am full of hope now—everything I attempt succeeds—the purse of Fortunatus is bequeathed me! Why should *you* fear?"

"I will tell you. May I tell you frankly?—will you hear me fairly?"

"To be sure I will," he said, releasing my hands, placing a seat for me, and flinging himself carelessly on a couch by the window. "Now then, Barbara, see how patiently I will listen. I'm in so enviable a mood this afternoon, that I could give a fair hearing to anything. Now then?"

"Are you prepared for the old story, began in your rooms at Pimlico, continued here?"

"Quite prepared."

"I thought so; but it is not that story I have come to talk about, although its sequel I may doubt still."

"A new story?—all the better," said he,

catching at the silk tassel of the window-blind and spinning it round rapidly; "now, Barbara of the Woful Countenance—Barbara de la Mancha—this story of your fear."

"My fear for others, understand, as well as for yourself."

"Proceed."

"My fear for a young, romantic girl, too impulsive, perhaps too wilful, to be trusted with herself—one who has won my heart to love her by her very weakness."

"Well?"

Andrew had flung aside the tassel, and was roused to a deeper attention than he had bargained for. In the great brown eyes there was an anxious look, too, and it was beyond his power to disguise it.

"You know I speak of Miss Tresdaile."

"I can guess as much."

"Oh! Andrew, and is not all that passed last night between Miss Tresdaile and yourself easy to be guessed too—natural to be feared? Is there hope of but one solution to the riddle?—and does not that one destroy my trust in you for ever?"

"What has Miss Tresdaile told you?" he cried, starting to his feet; "I demand an answer before I attempt to justify my actions?"

"I am not Miss Tresdaile's confidant."

"Then does a mere unjust suspicion warrant you in this attack?" he cried; "give you a right to asperse me and that friend you talk of loving and admiring? Barbara, it is you who are changing, you whose future I should fear!"

"I hope I may be wrong," I said, eagerly; "that I am here to-day full of cruel and unjust suspicions, no one will be more grateful than myself. I am but speaking, Andrew, of those suspicions frankly — where is the fair hearing I was to receive?"

He resumed his seat on the sofa, and said loftily:—

"I will hear you to the end, waiting, as Miss Bloyce waits, for an honourable explanation."

There was a hope that I had been deceived—a faint and dreamy hope, which I

prayed might brighten ere I left him. His great surprise, his indignation, his wounded feelings, which there was no attempt to disguise all led me on to lighter, better thoughts.

Full of that hope, I told my story with less excitement, in a voice less tremulous; told him of my watch last night for Alice's return, of the words I had heard spoken at the door, and of Alice's strange manner.

"If those words apply to something foreign to my doubts, if I have put a false construction on them," I concluded, "I shall be very happy, Andrew, and I ask humbly and heartily your pardon."

When I had concluded, he sat still and silent for some moments, his white forehead furrowed and his lips compressed.

"Barbara," said he, raising his eyes at last, "why not have spared me this recital, this humiliation? Miss Tresdaile could have given you the answers you require better than myself."

"Had I a right to ask Miss Tresdaile?"

"Had you a right to ask me?"

"I think so," I replied; "you are not quite a stranger to me. In old times, when we were boy and girl together—when you loved me better, Andrew!—we had no secrets from each other. Your boyish troubles were for my ear, my cares for yours. I do not wish, I cannot expect those old times back again, but still I think my right exists to question you."

"You are mistaken," he said; "the sister's privilege does not extend so far—neither is it the brother's place to satisfy an idle curiosity."

"Still thinking curiosity has led me hither, then?"

"Call it what you like," he said, "I dispute the right."

"And refuse all explanation, Andrew?" I asked sorrowfully.

The old doubts were coming back again, the shadows deepening as I gazed at him.

"Let me ask *you* one question, Barbara," said he; "supposing your foolish suspicions had been true—what then?"

"Will you not assure me they are false?"

"Supposing I had fallen in love with Miss Tresdaile, had proposed to her, and been accepted," he continued—"supposing my happiness and hers had depended upon our attachment remaining a close secret, would this action of to-day's have been a sister's or a friend's? Would my own sister have turned against me, and sought to mar my every chance in life?"

"Your sister would have remembered her duty to her mistress, as well as her love for you," I answered; "would have thought a little, too, of the young girl you were seeking to ensnare. Don't start so, it is a true word, for there would be no love or honour in your heart, nothing but mercenary calculation."

"Is not Miss Tresdaile likely to inspire a true passion?"

"Yes, in those who have known her long, not in those first attracted by stories of her prospects, and her rich grandmother's affection for her—men who would speculate

on her chances, her innocence and youth. I would be against such, however dear they were to me," I cried; "I would warn her and her best friends, of every step that took her nearer to the danger."

"Barbara de la Mancha," said he, suddenly assuming his light tone again; "what heroic history have you been reading lately?—why, you are a model heroine, there's nothing like you in the circulating libraries! Do I rave about duty, honour, and saving the lamb from the clutch of the eagle, and yet I have been playing your own part, although in seconding your watchfulness I have incurred a little abuse, and a great deal of distrust."

"Ah! you will tell me all then?"

"I will tell you the cause of Miss Tresdaile's excitement," said he; "I had not intended to keep you in the dark concerning it. Last night, in a thoughtless moment, I took the liberty, a great one, of warning Miss Tresdaile of her friends, the Hollingstons—hinting that there was a design against her, and father and daughter were both

conspiring to one end. So far from winning on Miss Tresdaile's heart by my suspicions, I gave her serious offence."

"And this design?"

"Is to make her an old man's wife."

"I have heard this before, Andrew, and have only considered its absurdity worth smiling at."

"Ah! you don't know Emily Hollingston—what a dangerous, fascinating power she is beginning to exercise over Mrs. Tresdaile's grand-daughter," said he; "and you do not seem to be aware, that that grand-daughter discredited my statement, and perhaps fancied I had interested motives."

"Had you?"

"Still suspicious, Barbara," said he; "I have said it was in a thoughtless moment. My impulse is to leap forwards, before looking at both sides of the argument. I was not overwise last night—it was no business of mine, and Miss Tresdaile's resentment has justly punished me for my officiousness."

"It is very strange."

"If in future conversation Miss Tresdaile

should allude to the part I played last night, pray make my apologies, and tell her that my absence from Hastings is sufficient proof that I will not offend again."

"Absence from Hastings?" I repeated.

"Better away—better away," said he; "she is young and beautiful, and I am passionate and poor! If I have no *motives* now, ardent or mercenary, as the case may be, I cannot say what temptation will not arise if I stay longer here. I go away to-night."

"So suddenly?"

"Is there inducement to remain, when another day may not leave me free?" he asked; "would Barbara Bloyce call it honourable to stay?"

He said it bitterly, although it was an effort at the old light tone with which the interview had commenced, and which had flashed forth once or twice in the middle of our warmer discussion. He had made his explanation, and I was trying to believe it—only trying, for there was much that shook my faith in him. There was a mystery; it hung round him like a cloud, and all

his earnestness, his specious words, even his light jesting, could not reassure me.

We parted friends, and yet that parting was so different to any that had been before—it troubled me so much! There was no pressure in the hand that held my own at last, and his light kiss on my cheek was strange and new to me. Had I wronged him, or had I been too easily persuaded to believe?—was it the sense of discovery, or the pang of wounded pride, which made the parting one of coldness and restraint? I did not know then—before me stretched an impenetrable veil; I was young, willing to have faith in him, and would not believe all that was whispering so near me.

And yet for ever after that—from the day on which he kept his word and went to London—the whispering ceased not, and the shadow on my path was never chased away.

CHAPTER XII.

RATHER ECCENTRIC.

I HAVE already remarked, that my suspicions did not die away with Andrew Bloyce's departure for London. It takes a long time to get over the blow which has struck at the roots of our confidence—the tree that is scathed seldom blossoms again. All my efforts to dislodge the dark thoughts that had fixed themselves in my brain seemed to burn them in deeper, though without was a calm, and the signs on the surface had rippled away.

Andrew had gone back to his studies, to his new art of fortune-making, and Alice

Tresdaile was not more thoughtful than usual ; on the contrary, reminded me more of the laughing, light-hearted girl I had known first in Stamford Street. I made no allusion to my interview with my brother, gave no voice to my suspicions, but kept silent yet wakeful. If there were danger, it was distant whilst he was away ; let the mask drop ever so little, and I wake to deceit and the sense of my duty.

“ May the waking never come,” I murmured to myself ; “ and may my suspicions remain—if they are to remain—unjust and cruel ! ”

The twelve or fourteen days that preceded the ball to be given at No. — Eversfield Place, passed rapidly away, although they seemed to Alice to drag along very heavily, despite her frequent conferences with Miss Hollingston. And Miss Hollingston was very busy, though she came to our apartments every day to talk about the invitations ; to tell Alice who was coming and who had disappointed her ; to talk a great deal of her ball-dress, and

just a little, for compliment's sake, about Alice's. Miss Hollingston's first thought in life was evidently dress, and when she was more than usually eloquent on that subject in my presence the thought would suggest itself, what would become of her fine ideas and her finery when the Colonel's credit was doubtful, and those difficulties at which Andrew had hinted were too strong to withstand?

'At which *only* Andrew had hinted, though!' said my doubtful heart again.

Colonel Hollingston had left his daughter to the troubles of preparation and arrangement—men are always so selfish!—and had gone off to some races, at which his favourite horse Starlight was expected to distinguish itself. Miss Hollingston did not miss much her natural protector; there was a great deal to superintend, and she enlisted Alice into her service and took her away very often to Eversfield Place.

"Never mind, they'll be gone after the ball," was Mrs. Tresdaile's consolatory assurance; "and if they come too often to

Stamford Street, I shall give them a bit of my mind, depend upon it."

The time passed away; arrangements were completed; the Colonel returned; Miss Hollingston's ball-dress arrived from London, and Miss Hollingston was happy.

That fashionable young lady had been desirous of introducing her milliner to Alice, but Mrs. Tresdaile had warned at this, and expressed her opinions on West-end milliners in no very measured terms.

'She knew all about *them*, the robbers, and she wasn't going to see Alice led into extravagance for anybody. Miss Bloyce understood dress-making, and would not object to the trouble; and, if she did, why she, Mrs. Tresdaile, would cut Alice's dress out herself! Alice could look over her grandmother's stock and see what pattern she would prefer!'

But Alice did not prefer any of her grandmother's dresses for copies, and took counsel of me in her perplexity.

"I don't want to hurt grandmother's feelings, but I'm not going out like a fright,

Barbara—and I do not feel inclined to have my white dress cut to pieces in any style.”

“I think you may trust me, Alice.”

“But there is no occasion for you to turn dress-maker, dear, in order to save a few shillings—besides, what do you know about the fashions?”

“The fashions ~~for~~ the month are easily obtained, Alice.”

Alice gave in with considerable reluctance, although we concocted together the prettiest dress that ever made a young girl, her brain dizzy with thoughts of her first ball, happy. And that first ball, dear sisters, is it not for ever marked with a white stone in the calendar of our recollections; was it not looked forward to as the seventh heaven, and, looking back now, is it not the fairest of retrospects? That first ball, where the lights were so dazzling, the music so bewitching, and where we were paid so much attention for the first time in our lives; where the gentleman with the dark eyes danced with us three times and took us in

to supper; where the two other gentlemen quarrelled about our hands, and said very acrimonious things, and looked inclined to cut each others' throats—white choker and all—where the night was so very soon over, and it was daylight behind the blinds before we thought of going home! Heigho! it faded like a dream, and yet, though the lights are turned out, the musicians are fiddling in Hades, and the gentleman with the dark eyes has married somebody else, it is a bright dream still!

It is strange that I should rhapsodize over a maiden's first ball—I, who was never invited to a ball in my life; perhaps it is because I am fond of dancing in my heart, and am not such a steady, matter-of-fact young lady as I would have the reader believe. At all events, I can sympathize with my sex and their anticipated delight, can wish them heartily the happiest of evenings, though I close the front door after them and go upstairs lonely and low-spirited.

Now I am confessing, I may as well make a clean breast of it, and say, that notwith-

standing a former observation of mine to Mrs. Tresdaile, I was *rather* sorry that I was not going to the ball with Alice, and somewhat mortified in my heart that Miss Hollingston had not thought me good enough to mix with her fine guests—that even Alice had not a single idea that I might be just a *leetle* disappointed! Why, ladies, is there anything more *trying* to the feelings than to see our sisters or bosom friends making extensive preparations for the ball or the party to which we are not invited—seeing the lace, and the jewels and the flowers spread out, and know we are not going to wear them?

Alice looked very beautiful on the evening of the ball—was conscious of it, too, as she glanced admiringly at herself in the dressing-glass.

“I don’t know how many hearts you are destined to win, Alice,” I said, “but don’t lose your own quite so early in life.”

“Do you think me so impressionable, then?” asked Alice, with a cheek that slightly flushed.

"Are ladies of eighteen years of age very strong-minded beings?"

"I am strong-minded enough, Barbara, to have no fear for the ordeal."

"Ah! take care, for if the heart be not gone already, there is no telling how soon it may be stolen away."

I said it lightly, though I was artful—perhaps wicked enough—to see if a chance shot would strike home to its mark. Had mixing so much with shrewd people made me sharper myself—made me curious, too, and full of suspicions?

The flush had not died away when she was bending her graceful head over the bouquet she had taken from the vase.

"I will take care, Barbara," she answered, with a strange little laugh.

Alice repaired to the drawing-room to wait for Colonel Hollingston, who was coming to fetch her in his brougham. Mrs. Tresdaile put on her spectacles for a critical survey of her grand-daughter, and gave a twirl to her chair that brought her full front with her.

"Fine feathers, my dear!" was her first observation. "I suppose you would like me to say you look very nice?"

"Not without you think so, grand-mamma."

"But I *do* think so," said the old lady; "so, if any of the dandies—there'll be some dandies there, or it won't be Miss Hollingston's fault—talk in the same strain, say you know all about it, for your grandmother told you. What time did that old man say he was coming?"

"About eight, grandma."

"It's half-past now—he knows what waiting for ladies is, silly as he looks!"

When Colonel Hollingston arrived that evening, he certainly did not look one of the wisest in the world—there was a peculiar expression on his countenance, as if last week's horse-racing had been a trifle too much for him, and either he or his valet had tied his white neckcloth too tight, and given him a suffocated appearance.

"Hope I have not kept you waiting, Miss Tresdaile?" said he, after he had bowed and

shaken hands with each of us ; "the fact is, my dear young lady, I am a quarter of an hour behind time, owing to—"

"Three quarters of an hour," muttered Mrs. Tresdaile.

"Eh, madam?" he said, quickly.

"You said eight—I heard you myself."

"Confound my stupidity!" he exclaimed ;
"I certainly thought I said half-past. I shall forget who I am myself next! Mrs. Tresdaile, can you account for this dreadful affliction?—Miss Hollingston can't make it out, neither can I."

"Softening of the brain, perhaps."

"Good Gord, madam, I hope not!" ejaculated the Colonel, with considerable alarm.

"Heaps of infirmities come upon us as we grow old," remarked Mrs. Tresdaile ;
"there's no stopping them, and I don't see why your brain shouldn't soften as well as anybody else's! You'll take care of my Alice?"

The Colonel, who had been looking very miserable, brightened up at this change of conversation.

"It will be a pleasure and an honour to take her under my protection."

"I almost wish I had accepted your invitation, Colonel, and was going with Alice myself," said Mrs. Tresdaile.

The Colonel gave a sickly smile, and was evidently trying to remember when he had invited Mrs. Tresdaile to Eversfield Place.

"I'm a little too old for dancing, perhaps, but I might have been company for you, while the young people were jumping their legs off."

"Ye—es," said the Colonel, dismally; "as you say, ma'am, company for me! Not," added he, briskly, "that I have quite given over dancing; on the contrary, I hope to have the honour of Miss Tresdaile's hand for the first quadrille."

Alice bowed, and her grandmother gave an emphatic grunt, whether of dissatisfaction or otherwise was doubtful to all of us. Colonel Hollingston prepared to bear away his fair charge, and Mrs. Tresdaile rose and walked to the window.

"I think it will rain, Alice," she observed; "you had better take my cloak with the fur collar to come home in. You'll find my clogs, too, in the hall—the Colonel can put *them* in his pocket."

"Yes, madam, clogs did you say, madam. God bless me!—great pleasure!"

Alice kissed her grandmother and me, received with a bright smile my wishes for "a pleasant evening," and then left the room with her military protector, who was never more relieved in mind than when he was outside on the landing.

Mrs. Tresdaile and I saw them enter the brougham and drive away, Alice entirely forgetful of the cloak and clogs which had been kindly proffered by her grandmother.

"I forgot to ask how long she would be," said Mrs. Tresdaile, beginning to get fidgety before the brougham was out of sight; "perhaps she intends to stop there till the morning and dance herself to death. It will be a long night this!"

"You surely do not think of sitting up till Miss Tresdaile's return?"

"I have not asked *you* to sit up, Miss Bloyce."

"But I could not think of your remaining here alone, till four or five in the morning, Mrs. Tresdaile."

"You're uncommonly considerate," she replied; "I suppose your anxiety on my account kept you from taking that hint of mine and going to the ball."

"Could I have accompanied Alice without an invitation?"

"Pack of stuff!" cried she, returning to her chair; "what did you want with an invitation? — they would have been very glad to see you."

"I do not think so, madam."

"I *do*."

Mrs. Tresdaile, after stirring the fire, looking at her watch, and then at the coals for several minutes, resumed the conversation.

"That Colonel Hollingston is one of the stupidest old men I have ever known," she said; "didn't it strike you, Miss Bloyce, that he was more silly than usual to-night?"

"He was certainly more abstracted."

"Perhaps his horses have been running the wrong way," was her next remark; "let us hope they have, at any rate."

"I should not like to hope that."

"He's an addlepate!"

And with this complimentary allusion to the absent, she subsided into a silence which no efforts of mine could disturb. It was a dull time before the supper tray was on the table, and, perhaps, the thoughts of the pleasure Alice was participating in did not render it more cheerful.

Over supper I thought of the ball at Eversfield Place, tried to fancy the bustling scene before me, and to follow Alice through its maze—and Mrs. Tresdaile's thoughts were drifting the same way. I knew that when she said suddenly:—

"I wonder what she's doing now?"

"Dancing, no doubt."

"I wonder whose her partner—what she thinks of him, and he of her? She's very young—I wish she hadn't gone!"

"I warned her not to lose her heart too soon, Mrs. Tresdaile."

"That was putting a lot of love nonsense into her head at once," she said; "very wise of you, Miss Bloyce, I must say!"

When the supper-tray had been taken down stairs—it was a late supper, too, for the clock in the hall was striking eleven when the maid-servant retired—Mrs. Tresdaile turned to her never-ending study of the fire.

"With all their finery, their carriages, and their apartments," she suddenly broke forth with, "they're nobodies! I could turn them round my little finger!—could buy up a dozen like them any day. They know that, too, or they wouldn't be so fond of Alice, and so condescending to a cross old woman. You are going to sleep, Miss Bloyce!"

"Am I, indeed?" I asked, sitting very upright in my chair, and trying to keep my eyes open.

"You had better have gone to the ball, for the company you are," she said; "why don't you go to bed?"

"I am not very tired," I answered;

"and I could not think of leaving you, to-night."

"*I shall sit up for Alice.*"

"But it will be so very late before she returns—you will be so fatigued in the morning, Mrs. Tresdaile."

"I can bear fatigue as well as most people."

She rested her elbows on her knees, took her chin between her hands, and studied hard the features of Alice Tresdaile in the fire. I was very sleepy, I remember; I had sat up late the night preceding, finishing Alice's ball dress, and had been fatigued all day in consequence. Despite my efforts I could not control my eyelids, which were very thick and heavy—they kept closing over my eyes, re-opening with a start, making the figure of my old companion assume all manner of shapes—now Barnaby, Bartholomew, George Keldon—now some one very misty and far off, some one who kept dwindling away into a dense background which swallowed everything in its folds, and wrapped me in its

midst, and stifled me into forgetfulness.

How long I had slept I knew not, but when my eyes were open again the figure had gone, and there was an empty chair in its space. For the first waking moment it seemed natural enough; then there was a start, and my heart began thumping violently. Where was Mrs. Tresdaile? I sprang up and looked around me. Not in the room, not anywhere in sight. The fire was out—only one candle was on the table; the door which the maid-servant had closed behind her was open—wide open!

“She may have gone round the house, after her usual fashion,” I said to myself. It was likely enough, and yet I did not believe it.

“She may have retired to bed.” I did not believe that either, though I hastened from the room and crossed the landing. I shall not easily forget the fright I received when Mrs. Tresdaile's bedroom door was pushed open, and Mrs. Tresdaile herself, in bonnet and cloak, stood before me!

"You might have knocked," said she;
"what's the matter?"

"Oh! madam, you are not going out
to-night?"

"Just for a little walk, that's all," she
replied; "have you seen my stick any-
where, Miss Bloyce?"

She spoke too coolly, too rationally for a
mad woman, but I could not help thinking
of Bartholomew Tresdaile's remarks, and
feeling very cold over them.

"You surely did not think of leaving the
house alone, Mrs. Tresdaile?"

"Am I not old enough to take care of
myself?"

"But—but it is so strange!"

"Strange times, Miss Bloyce," she an-
swered, "and I am a strange woman.
People have told me so by their looks for
the last forty years. Where are *you* going?"

"To get my bonnet and shawl. If I
cannot persuade you to remain, madam, I
must accompany you."

"*Must!*" repeated Mrs. Tresdaile; "what!
are you a firm woman, too?"

"When occasion needs it."

"Suppose I forbid you going?"

"I shall go! It will not be safe to let you proceed alone at such an hour of the night."

"Get your things on, then," said she, giving way; "you will find me in the drawing-room."

I was in my room, had found my bonnet and shawl in the dark, and was in the drawing-room again before Mrs. Tresdaile had taken her stick from the corner by the fire-place.

"You seem very much agitated," said Mrs. Tresdaile, after watching my trembling hands at my bonnet strings; "there is nothing to be alarmed at. I am not going out of my mind, Miss Bloyce."

"May I ask—"

"Presently," she interrupted; "we can talk about that in the street. This is not a wild freak of mine, make your mind easy upon that point, Miss Bloyce, but an old intention, which has been fixed for many days."

"It is all very incomprehensible."

"I have been silent lately, *like yourself*," she said, "but I haven't been less thoughtful. I have had my thoughts and built my plans as well as my companion and my granddaughter; and I am not to be duped even in old age!"

"I trust you have had no cause to suspect me, or Miss Tresdaile, madam?" I said.

"No—no cause," she answered, quickly; "all guess work—perhaps all nonsense. Miss Bloyce," catching me by the hand; "I don't think you would deceive me?"

"I am sure I would not."

"I do not think you would betray me, or my last hope of happiness," she continued, "for the world. If there were danger—no matter how far in the distance—to me or *it*, you would do your best to warn me?"

"Yes."

"I don't ask for your suspicions, but when they ripen into proof, may I ask for your assistance?"

"And rely upon it."

"God bless you!"

She dropped my hand and moved towards the door. It was the first kind speech from her, the first sign that the heart was not all hard or withered, almost the first token that she had trust in me. Feeling so lonely until then, and that Alice, Andrew, all I loved, were drifting further from me every day, it was a comfort to be aware of one—however old and strange—who was advancing nearer! Slowly down the stairs, along the passage, Mrs. Tresdaile first, I following light in hand. Mrs. Tresdaile had her wits about her.

“Did you put the candle out, Miss Bloyce?” said she, stopping suddenly.

“Yes, ma'am.”

“It won't do to leave anything burning—we may be gone two hours. Did you lock your bed-room door?”

“No.”

“Careless woman,” she remarked; “the maid would have thought you had gone to bed, then. There's a latch-key hanging somewhere here—oh! here it is! Are you ready?”

I was quite ready.

"Then put out the light."

The light was extinguished, the door opened, and closed noiselessly behind us.

We were standing in the street at last; the air was soft and warm that autumn night, but as I glanced upwards the black sky overhead seemed to threaten rain.

Mrs. Tresdaile passed her arm through mine, made good use of her stick, and walked onwards with a briskness quite new to her.

"We are not going far—merely to a friend of ours in Eversfield Place."

"You must pardon me, madam, but I cannot see the object of this journey."

"To make sure all is right there—that everything is fair to me and Alice."

"But—"

"But I don't mean to look in, you would say—why not? The Colonel gave me an invitation some weeks ago—if he has forgotten it, I have a better memory. That invitation, Miss Bloyce, I accepted—*for to-night!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE ECCENTRIC STILL.

EVERSFIELD PLACE would have presented a dark and desolate appearance that particular evening, had it not been for one bright flood of light which broke the line of shadow in the roadway, and told of revelling and feasting. The shutters were closed and the lights gone from most of the houses in Eversfield Place—here and there a solitary gleam from upstairs windows told of watchers and late hours. It was a high, restless tide that night; we could hear it lashing against the wall beneath, see the

spray now and then leap with a heavy plash above it and fall upon the causeway.

There were no carriages before Colonel Hollingston's house—the hour was too late for arrivals, too early for departures. The boys who had been hanging round the doors and criticizing the visitors had all gone home; there was not even a policeman on the pavement, or a coast-guardsmen on the Parade. Mrs. Tresdaile and I had it all to ourselves as we stood at some little distance from the house, looking up at the illuminated windows and listening to the music. The windows of the first-floor were open, though the blinds were down, and we could hear the shuffling of the dancers' feet, and the murmur of their voices, whenever the sea lulled.

"They are happy enough within," said my eccentric companion; "perhaps I had better not upset them by my ghastly presence—upset Alice, too—eh?"

"It might disturb her, not expecting you," I said, willing enough to second an amendment to the old lady's first resolution.

"And yet I came out with the intention of calling on Colonel Hollingston," said she, "of remaining at his house till Alice's return."

"And what was to become of me, Mrs. Tresdaile?"

"You came with your own free-will, Miss Bloyce," was the answer, "nobody asked you! You can accompany me or go back again, which you please."

"Then you really mean to enter?"

Mrs. Tresdaile hesitated.

"I'll think of it again. It's a step that ought to be considered, perhaps. How it would surprise them, though,—he, he!"

The temptation to surprise the visitors, and make them all uncomfortable by her sudden appearance in their midst, was too strong for Mrs. Tresdaile.

She turned back again.

"I have been invited. People shouldn't talk of the pleasure of seeing me at any time, if they don't mean what they say. It will be a lesson to them."

"Have you quite made up your mind, Mrs. Tresdaile?"

"Quite, and if—" She stopped, and her fingers closed tightly on my arm.

"Look there!"—she said, in a husky whisper; "keep close in the shadow here—do you see anything?"

"On—on the balcony?"

"Yes—on the balcony—Alice!"

She had passed out through the curtains, from the glare, and heat, and noise of the room—passed out *not alone!* It was Alice—the figure, the dress, the pattern of the cloak that draped her graceful form, were all well known to us—and *he* by her side, leaning over her and talking earnestly—was he not known unto us also?

Mrs. Tresdaile turned to me with flashing eyes.

"Your brother!"

"Yes," I answered, with a sinking at the heart.

"You told me he was in London—that he had left here a week ago. What trickery is this?"

"I did not think he would be there," pointing towards the house, "to-night."

"Did Alice?" she asked, eagerly.

"God knows!"

The hand which had trembled on my arm seemed to grow rigid as I spoke, and the form that had shaken and bent with excitement drew itself up very erect and firm. I did not dare to look into her face.

"Your brother!" she repeated, in a hissing whisper.

My brother—my false brother, who had sought to deceive me, until the play was acted and the plot was finished. My brother, who sought to win—who *had* won, for one hand was locked in his, and his traitor's arm was round her waist—a fond and unsuspecting girl to love him. In the flush of conquest, proud of his triumph, bending over her till his lips touched the scented hair in which the flowers lurked, he did not dream of the power to balk him that waited in the streets that night!

"You told me once, Miss Bloyce, that you would answer for that man as for your-

self. Where is your confidence now?"

"Gone, madam!—gone for ever!"

"I read a truer story in his false face, when I first met him, than you had studied there in all your life."

"My eyes were blinded by a sister's love—it is hard, oh, it is hard, to distrust those nearest to our heart."

"See!"

Another figure on the balcony—the arm hastily withdrawn, Alice and Andrew more distinct and separate.

"Miss Hollingston," I murmured.

"A pretty love scene spoilt by an intermeddler," remarked Mrs. Tresdaile; "let us leave them for the present."

She turned her back upon the house of Hollingston, and silently retraced her steps along Eversfield Place, looking defiantly before her. Some plan of action had evidently suggested itself to her, and she was not a woman to sleep upon her plans. Trouble seemed to steel her nerves, not discompose them, and every step firm and unwavering at my side told of a settled purpose.

"Miss Bloyce," she said at last, "have you anything to say to me?"

"To say that no one regrets more bitterly the duplicity of my brother, nor has made a greater effort to save Alice from the snare," I replied; "to confess that a week ago I charged my brother with an attempt to win clandestinely the affections of your grand-daughter, and that he—like a coward—spoke falsely and denied it. To beg you to command me, in any way or shape you may think best, for Alice Tresdaile's sake."

"You take part against your brother, then?"

"My brother is a fortune-hunter, and, in his greed of gain, has no consideration for the love and hopes of others—would sacrifice them all to his cupidity. Oh! Mrs. Tresdaile, I see it all now!—I knew it all before, and would not listen to the warning voice!"

"Ah! girl, had you lived to my age, you would have learned to read the human heart a little quicker—and yet," she added,

"he is no common schemer. He plays a deep and artful game—even Bartholomew, a deep schemer too, was foiled at his own weapons."

"Bartholomew Tresdaile?"

"Your brother has been watched some weeks; Bartholomew has played the spy upon him at my bidding, has sought his company, and tempted him to show his cards, but all in vain. If *he* has failed, Miss Bloyce, I need not wonder at yourself."

"Oh! madam, can you trust that grand son?"

She started, but she did not answer. Other thoughts were crowding on her, and she would not let a new suspicion add to the weight already on her mind. I knew she had dismissed the thought, and was thinking of that one great trouble to which all else was nothing, when she spoke again.

"I was fool enough to believe my last days would be the happiest," she said; "that I had borne my heaviest load, my greatest care, years and years ago before

this head was white. What dreamers we are all!"

"This care may be but transitory," I said; "Alice once warned—"

"I am in no mood for comfort," she interrupted, sternly; "will you please to let me think?"

We should have walked the rest of the way home in silence, had it not been for a late-going fly which reached the corner of the street at the same time as ourselves.

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Tresdaile.

The man drew up, and Mrs. Tresdaile walked to the edge of the pavement to interrogate him.

"Are you engaged?"

"No, marm."

"I shall want you for some hours — if I pay you well I suppose you will not object?"

"Not much, marm," replied the fly-driver, with a grin.

"You need not make that face," said Mrs. Tresdaile, more after her usual manner;

"when you are asked, it will be quite time enough! Get down and open the door."

The man descended the box, opened the door, lowered the steps, and assisted Mrs. Tresdaile and myself into a dark, cavernous interior.

"Where to, marm?"

"The Railway Station."

The man looked puzzled.

"No more trains to-night," he ventured to observe.

"Who said there was, you blockhead!" she exclaimed; "will you hold your peace, and take me where I tell you?"

The man clambered hastily into his seat, and vented his indignation on his horse which he lashed and anathematized in the most unfriendly manner.

"My dear Mrs. Tresdaile, I hope you are not hasty—I hope you understand—"

"I understand, Miss Bloyce, that every hour in this accursed place is full of danger to my peace and Alice. Will you understand that nothing on earth can move me in my purpose—that my own comfort,

any waste of money, will not stand in *my* way. I asked you once to let me think—I ask again!”

I said no more, and rapidly we were borne towards the Railway Station, Mrs. Tresdaile by my side mapping out the future silently.

Before the station at last, Mrs. Tresdaile and I on the steps trying the handle of the door. It was locked, but there was a light within, and we could hear some one moving to and fro. A vigorous application of the stick to the panels brought that some one, who looked cross and sleepy, to the door.

“What is it?” he inquired, not very civilly.

“It’s a good many things,” she answered, “if you’ll please to pay attention to them, and not block up the doorway.”

“Oh!”

The man backed and made room for the ingress of Mrs. Tresdaile and me.

“Are you on the telegraph here?”

“Yes, I am.”

"I want to send a message to London."

"Is it written?"

"No."

"Perhaps you'll write it. Here's a pen and ink."

The man disappeared behind a wainscot partition, locked himself in, opened a little pigeon hole and made his sudden appearance thereat like an unamiable Jack in the box.

Mrs. Tresdaile placed the pen in my hands and said huskily—

"Will you write my Stamford Street address and my housekeeper's name, Miss Bloyce?"

I did so, and looked up for further orders into the cold grey eyes bent over my shoulder at the paper.

"Get ready—coming home directly."

The words were written, the paper tendered to the clerk, who walked to the back with it and began chopping something vigorously. Presently a bell rang, and the clerk began chopping away again as though he were making Mrs. Tresdaile's message

into mince-meat. Mrs. Tresdaile might have had that suspicion herself, for she tried to squeeze her black velvet bonnet through the pigeon hole to see what he was after.

"Anything more?" said the man, after Mrs. Tresdaile had drawn forth a very long and heavy purse, which I had never seen in her possession before, and which she had brought out with her for security's sake.

"Yes, I want a special train to London."

"A what!" exclaimed the man, looking hard at my mistress, and scarcely able to reconcile the order with its giver.

"I said a special train—there is such a thing to be got for money, I suppose, and if a hundred pounds will buy one—double that, if you like—I'll have it before morning!"

The man looked at the purse which Mrs. Tresdaile was shaking ostentatiously, caught sight of the gold and the creased notes through the network, and dropped his incivility and his sour looks before that mighty magician whose spell is so hard to withstand.

'He must wake up the station-master—

he would have to telegraph to Brighton for a train—would the lady be kind enough to step into the waiting-room?’

“How long will this train be?”

‘An hour at least, perhaps an hour-and-a-half. If madam would be kind enough to step into the waiting-room, he would fetch the station-master in a minute.’

Mrs. Tresdaile laid a bank-note before the clerk and passed her arm within mine again.

“There is an earnest of my intention—that will satisfy the station-master, I daresay. In an hour-and-a-half I shall return and expect to find the train ready for me and the luggage. There is my address, send somebody round for my boxes when you are ready.”

We went out of the station, the man with the bank-note in his hand, very civil now, but very much bewildered. Into the fly again, and rattling back along the dark road to Mrs. Tresdaile's apartments, the figure by my side still stern and silent, and mapping out the future.

Standing in the drawing-room which we

had quitted at so late an hour, Mrs. Tresdaile gave orders for the arousal of the maid and the immediate packing of her boxes—anyhow, in any fashion, so that they *were* packed and ready in an hour. That order being given, she went downstairs in search of Mrs. Elwes, and began battering at the kitchen-door with a vehemence that thoroughly roused the inmates of the house; for night-capped heads began to look over banisters, and voices to shout down inquiries and airily attired figures to flit so recklessly about the landing, that I had to shut the door and call through the key-hole that nothing was the matter, only my mistress going away, and would they get into their rooms please, for she would be coming upstairs again in a minute.

I do not remember how that packing process was performed by me and Mrs. Tresdaile's maid; I only know that Mrs. Tresdaile's injunctions were fulfilled, and that the things were huddled and crammed into the boxes in any fashion before the hour had expired. Certainly, when the

boxes were locked and corded to the best of our ability, there were a great many articles left out and several of Mrs. Elwes's put away.

"Leave them all," said Mrs. Tresdaile, in her new reckless mood; "mine are of no consequence, can easily be bought in London. I will pay Mrs. Elwes for anything I have taken by mistake, or send it back next week. How slow you are, Miss Bloyce!" she cried, with a stamp of her foot; "here is the porter for the boxes in the passage, and he says the train has been telegraphed as on its way. Will you go to the Railway Station, Mary, and wait for us, and not stand staring there! Now, Miss Bloyce, we have left Miss Tresdaile too long with her dear friends."

In the fly again, and making for Colonel Hollingston's in Eversfield Place, where hearts were so light, so full of life and love, over the brightness of which no curtain had yet fallen. Through the darkness; along the gloomy road, with the hoarse sea bellowing at us, and the rain, which had been

threatening so long, driving in at the open window, against which Mrs. Tresdaile sat.

"Had I not better close the window?" I suggested; "it's raining very fast."

"Let it be."

"You will take cold—you are hot and excited now—your hand is very feverish."

"It does not matter."

She kept that feverish hand upon the window; she sat there with that old hard look upon her face, and the rain which beat upon her did not make her flinch. Was the future still difficult to plan?—did it still absorb her thoughts and keep her silent, careless of her rest and health? There were carriages before Colonel Hollingston's door now, and coachmen on the boxes or standing under the balconies and in doorways, talking of the weather, their horses, and back-biting their masters and mistresses like flunkies of the first water. The fly had to draw up in the rear of a Clarence, some five doors from Colonel Hollingston's; and Mrs. Tresdaile, too impatient to wait her turn, hastily descended, motioned me

to follow, walked along the wet pavement to the house, and marched me into the hall.

There were several servants in the background—servants hired from London at a guinea a-night, and travelling expenses paid—and one of them, evidently majordomo for the occasion, came towards us with a pompous strut worthy of his temporary master. Mrs. Tresdaile's appearance was very deceptive, no one would have taken her that night for a lady of property; if there were every excuse for the telegraph clerk, his eyes being half shut and the gas at the Hastings station turned down, surely with the hall lamps shining on a faded green cloak, and a velvet bonnet crushed out of all shape from frequent contact with the roof of a fly, there was no great want of discrimination in the domestic with the calves.

"Come, I say, you musn't come in here!"

"Where's Colonel Hollingston?"

"Busy, my good woman, busy. You had better call to-morrow."

"Tell him, Mr. Impudence, that Mrs. Tresdaile has accepted his invitation—and be quick about it, will you!"

Mrs. Tresdaile's imperious manner made a sensible impression upon Jeames, who backed on to the toes of Jeames No. 2, and elicited some audible oaths in consequence. Whispered consultation, a spruce-looking page in dancing pumps fetched from a side room (a youth who had called at our apartments once or twice with messages), glances in the direction of Mrs. Tresdaile—glances fierce and annihilating from the gaunt figure by my side.

One of the footmen went upstairs at last, and the page came forward and asked if we would step into the waiting-room, an inquiry which Mrs. Tresdaile did not deign to answer.

"Had you not better ask for Miss Tresdaile?" I inquired.

"I have asked for Colonel Hollingston."

"But you will not tell him!"

"Is it likely?"

Some rustling above, a voice calling down

"Lady Mowbray's carriage!"—a voice shouting it along the hall—a third repeating it outside in the rain—a clattering of horses' heels—a rolling of wheels—a bustle before the door—a lady in lace and feathers descending the stairs escorted by a gentleman—Mrs. Tresdaile keeping her ground, and frowning down Lady Mowbray's curious stare—Barbara Bloyce more abashed, trying to slink behind a statue in the hall.

The carriage had hardly borne away two of the guests, when Colonel Hollingston tumbled down the stairs in a state of great excitement, his round blue eyes half out of his head with astonishment.

"God bless me, my dear Mrs. Tweezers, what *is* the matter—is it anything very serious—and Miss Noise, too—dear me—how highly flattered and surprised I am! Your grandfather's upstairs—no, your brother I mean, with Miss Tweezdaile and all the little ones—oh, Lord! this is very extraordinary!"

"You remember your invitation, Colonel Hollingston?"

"I can't very well recollect it now, my dear madam, though I remember it perfectly—the fact is, I am suffering from astonishment on the brain—I shall be better in a minute. Invitation, oh, yes!"

"I told you I should take you by surprise."

"Yes—ha, ha!—how very playful, to be sure!"

"I regret I could not join you sooner—that I can only stop a few minutes, Colonel, now I have come. Will you introduce me to your guests?"

"Certainly—but—"

The Colonel's reasoning faculties were slowly developing—he looked at the deformed bonnet, at the green cloak with its French poodle collar and large brass clasp, and would have probably expressed an opinion that it was hardly ball-room costume, had not a second attack of Mrs. Tresdaile's routed his senses completely.

"Do you keep me here with your lacqueys, Colonel Hollingston," she asked, sharply; "or think I am not good enough

for your fine friends upstairs? I want to see my grand-daughter—to take her home with me at once, and I *will* see her, too!”

“Of course—yes, no—its quite proper enough—this way, ma’am—highly delighted all of us—Miss Hollingston will be delighted too—sure to be—dear, dear, dear!”

And in a state of nervous trepidation that was really pitiable, the simple old man offered his arm to Mrs. Tresdaile and escorted her upstairs, I following and trembling. I did not intend to enter the ball-room, but I was doubtful to what extent my mistress's eccentricity might lead her—doubtful how far her energy would carry her, and whether it might not fail her suddenly, and leave her a poor helpless woman, prostrate with age and grief.

The Colonel paused outside the door, looked at the velvet bonnet again, and coughed feebly; Mrs. Tresdaile pushed the door open with her stick, and looked in upon the dancers. She did not enter; she seemed content to stand there and gaze upon the scene beyond, to wait patiently

till Alice crossed her line of vision. The music—light dance music that was strangely in contrast to our painful thoughts—floated through the room; the guests whirled by, only a few sitting near the door became aware of the group of three gazing in upon them. What they thought of us is difficult to say; the presence of the Colonel by the side of the tall old lady was a guarantee for our respectability, though it offered no solution to the mystery. Waltzing by, at last came Alice and Andrew Bloyce; and one lady sitting near the window, who had been half hidden in the shadows of the curtains, and had not attracted my attention hitherto, leaned forward and looked after them—so long and earnestly, with so peculiar an expression on her face, that when the happy pair had flitted by I turned to her instinctively. Had it not been for the quick heaving of her bosom, she might have been calmly sitting for her portrait. A fair portrait, too, in her rich ball dress, with the jewels sparkling in her raven hair, with that curling lip, and those dark eyes so full

of earnestness. Even the curtains falling behind her would have made a fair background of drapery for that fine patrician figure.

As they came whirling round again—how fondly he seemed to press her to his heart!—Miss Hollingston, for it was she, turned away her eyes and looked across at the open door, and at us standing there. A scarlet flush suffused her cheeks, but she rose and came very easily and quietly towards us, shut herself out with us on the landing.

“Mrs. Tresdaile,” with a graceful inclination of the head, but with a haughty expression on her face, that was new to her when addressing Alice’s grandmother, “this visit takes us by surprise, and flatters us exceedingly.”

“No doubt,” was the absent reply.

Mrs. Tresdaile was quick enough to see the change of demeanour in Miss Hollingston, would have been quick enough to resent it, had her thoughts not been otherwise employed.

"I cannot suppose you have visited us as a guest in this eccentric way—and dress," she added, after a pause; "perhaps Colonel Hollingston has been favoured with an explanation?"

"My dear Emily," said the Colonel, surprised himself at his daughter's frigid reception of Mrs. Tresdaile, "what's the matter?"

"Miss Hollingston," said Mrs. Tresdaile, "we take strange means when we make a strange discovery. My eccentric way and dress require no excuse. I have come here for my Alice—to take her away at once, to forbid you and all *your crew* that have conspired against me from seeing her again."

"I do not understand this violence or coarse language," said Miss Hollingston, loftily, as she placed her gloved hand on the door-handle, and slowly turned it; "shall I tell Miss Tresdaile you are waiting for her?"

"It is the only favour you can do me."

"Bless and save us, Miss Boys, what does

it all mean?" asked the Colonel, in a whisper to me. But I had no time to reply, the Colonel, obeying a sign made by his daughter, hastily followed her into the ball-room, and left Mrs. Tresdaile and me on the landing.

"Shall I follow these stuck-up people?" asked my mistress, mockingly.

"No, no, Mrs. Tresdaile, spare yourself further excitement. Alice will be here in one moment, and then we can all go quietly away."

The door was opened again, and Miss Hollingston re-appeared accompanied by Alice, who turned very pale at seeing us.

"Grandmother—Barbara—oh! what's the matter? Is there any bad news from India?"

"I have come to fetch you away, that's all," was the hollow response; "are you ready?"

"Ye—es."

"Have you any farewells to take?" asked her grandmother. "I don't think, whilst I live, you will ever see these people again—certainly not with my consent."

"Emily?" cried Alice, looking in a bewildered manner at her friend.

"It is Mrs. Tresdaile's wish," coldly replied Miss Hollingston; "it must be mine."

Alice drew her cloak round her and prepared to descend the stairs. She kept her face averted from Miss Hollingston, and murmured, "Very well!"

The Colonel's daughter made one quick step towards her with extended arms, then checked herself and turned away.

"No, better as it is!"

Another moment and the drawing-room door had closed behind her, and we three were going slowly down the stairs. A few more minutes and we were on our way towards the Hastings railway station, where the special train, a couple of guards with lanterns, the roused station-master and the clerk, were waiting our coming on the slippery platform.

"Alice," said her grandmother, "we are going to London."

"To-night?" she asked, roused from her deep brooding over the rapid events that

had recently passed over her young life, disturbing it not lightly, and leaving marks thereon that no time would ever efface.

"At home, in London, ask me for all explanation, and I will give it you—ask *me*, and not Miss Bloyce; it is my wish."

"Is it so great a mystery?"

"It is a mystery that your heart can guess, if you look back to all that has passed since we saw each other last."

Alice changed colour, trembled, then was silent.

Silent all the way home along that iron road, at that early hour of the morning, travelling in so wild and extravagant a fashion, as if life and death depended upon our being seventy-four miles from Hastings before sun-rise.

Silent and thoughtful as myself, or the drowsy shivering maid; the rapid current of events whirling round her brain, confusing everything, and leaving no single, quiet spot to rest on and breathe freely. Silent and thoughtful as the firm old lady who sat

opposite, still mapping out the future, and seeking to pierce into its depths with gleaming sleepless eyes.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK III.

"She's not the first has done
Amiss ; her own affections were the surest guide
Unto her own content ; she chose to please
Herself, not you ; come, let this anger cease."

FORDE.

"'Tis only for a span, a summer's day.
Deep in the fitful twilight have I striven,
Must now the even-feast of rest be holding :
One curtain falls—and lo! another play!
'His will be done whose mercy much has given!'"

CHAMISSE.



CHAPTER I.

STORMY.

AT eighty-three years of age one cannot sit up all night, go out in the wet, *attend balls*, and travel at unseasonable hours, with impunity—the constitution no longer strong, or the frame no longer active, has to battle hard with the reaction which nature exacts. Life in its spring can defy a great deal, can flutter from concert to ball, from ball to the opera, night after night of the season; but there is no turning night into day after grey locks and spectacles have come to our share. Time then to be careful, to study our diet and consult our medical

men ; to keep good hours, and be of the stay-at-home order, or dyspepsia, rheumatism, and a hundred other horrid complaints will soon inform us we are going too fast.

Mrs. Tresdaile had not only kept late hours, been caught in the rain, and stood in a variety of draughts that memorable night recorded in my last book ; she had given way to some excitement, and suffered a great deal from suppressing more—the cord had been drawn too tight, and Mrs. Tresdaile had to take to her bed on her arrival in Stamford Street, and send post-haste for the doctors.

Ill as she became, and numerous as were the injunctions she received to keep herself perfectly quiet, Mrs. Tresdaile could not resist summoning us to her bedside on the very first day of our return.

“ I'm not going off in a hurry,” were her first words ; “ so I have not called you here to listen to any last dying speeches. I only wish you both to refrain from one subject till I am better—you can guess what *that* is without my mentioning it. I have one

more request, and that is for Miss Bloyce's ears."

Alice shrank a little at the cold, almost indifferent, tones of her grandmother's voice; coloured a little, too, at the thought of Mrs. Tresdaile having a second request to make which rendered her absence necessary, and went out of the room with a heaving chest and swimming eyes.

"Tell that woman to go," cried Mrs. Tresdaile, pointing to the nurse.

The nurse did not wait for my injunction, but slipped out of the room with an embarrassed cough, and went downstairs to inform the housekeeper that "she was the ruffest old lady she ever had to do with—'pon her precious life!"

"This is the old time over again," she said; "nurses, and doctors, and gruel and poisons; but I shall get over this you know, Miss Bloyce — this is only weakness."

"I hope to see you downstairs in a day or two, madam."

"To-morrow—to-morrow!"

"Had you not better postpone further discussion till to-morrow, Mrs. Tresdaile?"

"I am not excited, Miss Bloyce," was the reply; "the doctor only feared for my brain, and that's as cool as a cucumber. Before you came in I was thinking," she said, with a mournfulness that went to my heart, "that I had not got much to live for now—that I should go downstairs again a deceived, unhappy old woman, in whom no one could put trust."

"You cannot be sure, Mrs. Tresdaile, that Alice intended to keep her secret from you," I said; "knowing Alice's nature well myself, I do not believe it for an instant."

"I do!" she cried, fiercely.

"Will you be kind enough to state your request, my dear lady, and let me leave you?" I urged; "I am sure I am doing wrong in talking to you."

"Why, you are as anxious as if you wished me to make haste and get well!"

"Don't you think I wish it, Mrs. Tresdaile?"

She did not answer for a moment; she lay and looked at me earnestly, finally drew one hand from the bed and held it straight towards me. I placed my own within it, and she grasped it very warmly.

"You're a good young woman—the best I've known, the only one perhaps who has ever cared for me! Your life will be a happy one."

"Oh, madam! there's no telling that."

"You have that within you which must make you happy, the absence of which has made my life a blank—content and faith."

"Oh! I am very discontented sometimes," I said, attempting to give a light turn to the subject, though her strange kind words had filled my eyes with tears.

"Discontented with that which is unjust, then," she said, still holding my hand, and still with that earnest look upon her face; "nothing worse than that. Miss Bloyce, life is uncertain after all—if I should not have another time to say this, or if I come down again the same snappish old woman not inclined to say anything, let me thank you

now for putting up with me so long, for loving me a little!"

"I deserve no thanks, madam," I answered, as she released my hand; "I have only tried to do my duty."

"You are forgetting my request."

"Ah! true."

She drew from beneath her pillow those keys that never left her night and day, which locked up all her secrets, all her money, and pointed to one of the boxes that we had brought from Hastings.

"You'll find my Will there—will you get it?"

"Surely some other time—"

"I'll have it now," she cried in her old tones, which, sharp as they were, I was very glad to hear—it was so like getting better!

The Will in my hands, and the keys returned to Mrs. Tresdaile, she said:—

"Put that paper in the fire—let it follow all the rest of them."

I paused.

"Have you seriously considered this act, madam?"

"It destroys your brother's chance of inheriting sixty thousand pounds, perhaps more—do you understand me?"

"Yes."

"It leaves Alice, till another Will is made, neither better nor worse than her brother, or her cousins," she said; "it sets aside an heiress, it thwarts him you love, and keeps him from the road to riches—perhaps hinders him, as the desire of wealth is next his heart, from ever being happy. Do you pause?"

"No!"

The Will fell on the blazing fire, smouldered, then burst into a flame. Mrs. Tresdaile, weak as she was, struggled into a sitting posture and closely watched it till nothing was left but a light impalpability, which the draught blew to pieces, and wafted up the chimney by degrees.

"That makes fifty-four of 'em," muttered the old lady, lying down composedly; "now I think I can sleep a bit, Miss Bloyce."

She slept but little that day, very little

the next—waking up by starts, suffering from dreams and periodical attacks of fever. She kept her bed one week; it was a long, miserable week to me, for during that time Alice studiously shunned me, was always cold and distant, evidently suspected that I had betrayed her love secret, and stood between her and her young romantic passion. I could make no avowal, enter into no explanation without breaking my promise to my mistress, so was forced to put up with my uncomfortable position, and nurse my sorrows silently. Only two events relieved the monotony of the week, the first of which was Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile's visit, some five days after his grandmother's illness, when he had been informed that Mrs. Tresdaile was not in Hastings, was not quite well, and wanted the books made up for the week: and the second a letter to my mistress, with the Indian post-mark.

Mrs. Tresdaile was well enough to read the letter, but to Alice's surprise and smothered indignation she made no comment,

and kept it under the pillow the remainder of the week, along with her great bunch of keys.

After having been once apprised of his grandmother's illness, Mr. Bart. Tresdaile made frequent calls at Stamford Street; the next two days he was in and out of the house from an early hour till bed-time; was fidgety, excited and anxious; laid in ambush for the doctor; harassed me about her symptoms,—what I thought of them, what Mrs. Tresdaile thought of them herself?

Barnaby Tresdaile and his cousin George Keldon, imagining their grandmother still in Hastings, kept away from Stamford Street, and left the run of the house to Bartholomew, who had the sole pleasure of advising his grandmother, and recommending her to keep her bed—it would do her so much good! Bartholomew became so solicitous at last that she should keep her bed, that the old lady turned out and dressed herself early one morning in order to aggravate him.

"Here I am again, Barty," said she, when his astonished head peered round the door at about 8 a.m.; "come in, and don't tip-toe about like a cat, there's a good man."

"My dear grandmother, are you sure you are strong enough to bear this effort?"

"Strong as you are, for I *can* keep myself straight!" said the old lady, bluntly.

"You'll never venture downstairs?"

"Not till I have had my breakfast."

"But the doctor says you must be very careful."

"The doctor will take himself and his nasty mixtures off this morning," said she, "so he won't have another opportunity of saying anything!"

The energetic woman kept her word, went downstairs that morning, took her usual place by the fireside, dismissed her nurse and medical attendant, and told Bartholomew in the plainest language 'not to come more often than once a week after this.'

Alice and I were very glad to see her in the great leathern chair again. Alice

might have other claims upon her heart, might have resolved upon much opposition if her grandmother's wish were that those claims should be cast aside, but she did not love her less, and a want of affection was not one of her faults.

"This last illness has shaken me up more than I thought," observed Mrs. Tresdaile, after she had settled herself in her chair, and recovered sufficient breath to speak; "and knocked a good many nails into my coffin, as the saying is—handfuls! How do you think I look, Miss Bloyce?"

"Much better."

"Better than I looked at Hastings?" she asked, quickly.

"No, madam, much better than you were last week, I meant to say."

"Ah! I don't know that I feel much better, although I *am* down here at my old post," she said; "I mayn't trouble you long, Alice, after all."

"Oh! grandmother, I hope you will trouble me many, many years," cried Alice, "and love me too, with all my faults."

"Many, many years!" echoed Mrs. Tresdaile, "and I am nearly four-and-eighty years of age. Hollow wishes enough, Alice, are they not?"

"You believe them wishes from the heart, grandmother," was the rejoinder.

"What do I know of your heart, Alice Tresdaile," said the old lady, more sternly; "is it a readable book to me; can I trust it, or you?"

The storm was coming, and I shrank from it. I knew that storm would come whenever strength allowed; that she who was now raising it had dwelt upon her wrongs all the days of her illness, and never once relented. There was one invulnerable spot to strike at in Mrs. Tresdaile, and Alice's own actions had sent the arrow deep.

Still I hastened to put off the evil hour; I had no trust in Mrs. Tresdaile's strength, or her power over herself, and I had no confidence in Alice's forbearance. There was no need to fear the last, however; throughout the interview Alice did

not forget the illness of her grandmother, the bodily prostration from which she sat there a sufferer. With all that cruel firmness to resist, as characteristic of herself as of her grandmother, she did not, under great temptation, great provocation, lose her self-command in Mrs. Tresdaile's presence.

"Will not to-morrow—some days hence—suffice for this?" I pleaded.

"Some days hence may be too late," affirmed Mrs. Tresdaile, drawing from her pocket the Indian letter which had arrived last week.

"I do not intend this to be a long conference," she resumed; "there's no occasion for it. I have but little to say, but on that little I shall be very positive. You hear, Alice?"

"Every word, madam."

"The letter that I hold in my hands is from your brother Ernest," said Mrs. Tresdaile; "he is on his way to England. He is tired of India, and has resolved upon a home in this land."

"This is good news, grandmamma."

"You have not seen him since you were three years old, Alice—it is doubtful if his habits or his home will suit you."

"His home?" repeated Alice.

"Shall I have a right to keep you here—shall I care to keep you here, if what I fear be true."

Mrs. Tresdaile re-folded the letter and consigned it to her pocket again. Alice sat very silent, very patient, the only sign of any effort at restraint being the two small hands which were not lightly clasped together.

"We come to the one foolish subject," commenced Mrs. Tresdaile, "of your weakness. I say weakness, for you have not been strong enough to resist a silly school-girl's fancy, or turn a deaf ear to the voice of flattery and deceit."

"Not deceit," said Alice, quietly.

"People think you an heiress, and set you down for the largest share of my money—is it likely those skilled in deceptive arts have forgotten you or your youth? No, they have sought you out,

speculated in your fine feelings, Alice, and made a dupe of you."

"You do not mention names, grand-mamma," said Alice.

"There is not much occasion," was the reply; "still, I will mention them if you like?"

"I would rather all be plainly put before me, that I may answer all more easily."

"I allude to Colonel Hollingston, his daughter and—Mr. Andrew Bloyce."

She rapped with her stick on the floor when the last-named gentleman was mentioned, and kept her eyes upon her granddaughter. Alice could not arrest the blush which mounted to her face and lingered there, although she answered calmly—with a little effort perhaps—

"I cannot understand how Colonel Hollingston or his daughter have incurred your displeasure, grandmother?"

"You can Mr. Andrew Bloyce, then?"

The colour had not left her cheek when she answered—

"Yes."

"Can you understand how Alice Tresdaile has incurred my displeasure by an artfulness beyond her years, by seconding the schemes of the fortune-hunter who has played his cards so well?"

"Alluding to Mr. Bloyce again, I presume?"

"Yes—the sharper!"

"It was understanding your nature too well, grandmamma, that led me to adopt a course you call deceit."

"What new-fashioned name have you christened it by?" asked Grandmother Tresdaile, bluntly.

"Precaution."

The scornful laugh which followed this reply was Alice's hardest trial; the hands were clasped tighter than before, and there was no slight contraction of the fair white brow.

"It was precaution. It was my concern for you," said Alice, "a desire to spare you unnecessary excitement, to postpone till a more suitable opportunity the confession of—of my engagement to Mr. Andrew Bloyce."

"An engagement!" repeated Mrs. Tresaile, "made by a young unthinking girl, seeking no advice from those who wished her well, and made on her own responsibility—so bad as that, then!"

"Grandmamma," said Alice, "the engagement was not made unthinkingly—was left at some future day for your consent to ratify."

"I will never consent!" exclaimed her grandmother; "*he* should have asked me before he played the robber and stole your foolish heart. He knew the part which it was best for him to act, and he succeeded in his plans. He knew that others older in the world's ways would have seen the object of his scheming at a glance."

"I cannot think it scheming."

"Call it love, then, or by whatever name pleases you best, Alice," returned Mrs. Tresaile; "is it to end or to continue?"

"His love—I will call it by that name—cannot be ended by a word, grandmamma," said Alice; "without your consent, let me add, I will not marry him until I come

of age, but I cannot cease to think of him as my future husband."

"Romance and rubbish!"

"Still the truth."

"Alice Tresdaile, do you really believe this man loves you?"

"Yes."

"That it is your beauty, not the money you may have, that lures him to you? It is a dream from which you will very soon awake!"

"You do not know him."

"Ask Miss Bloyce what faith *she* has in his honesty of purpose—whether she has not learned to mistrust him like myself."

"Miss Bloyce has soon learned to change," said Alice, with an angry glance towards me; "I will not prolong the discussion by inquiry."

"The discussion is ended," said Mrs. Tresdaile; "it has confirmed my fears, and will keep me watchful of you till your brother comes from India. When that time arrives, you will become his charge."

"Very well, madam," was Alice's reply.

"Till that time arrives, I forbid Mr.

Bloyce's correspondence with you—his presence at this house."

"You will suffer me to apprise him of the result of this conference, grandmamma?" said Alice; "after that your commands shall be obeyed."

Mrs. Tresdaile gave a short nod of her head in assent, and Alice closed the subject by rising to withdraw. When she had left the room Mrs. Tresdaile looked towards me.

"She has borne with me well—eh?"

"Very well."

"She promises obedience—do you believe in it?"

"Implicitly."

"There is hope for us," said Mrs. Tresdaile; "it is not quite so bad as I expected—she might have run away with him like my daughter did with Keldon. Will you go to her and see if she bears my rigour well, or whether I have wounded her too deeply? I shouldn't like to add to her troubles much, at this time!"

I was leaving the room in search of Alice when Mrs. Tresdaile called me back.

"It will be right to place her in her brother's charge—will it not?" she asked, eagerly—"it is proper she should leave me—I should be as firm and stern with her as with the rest of them?"

"Is Mr. Ernest Tresdaile a firm man?"

"I don't know—why do you ask?"

"Because I fear firmness will but make matters worse with Alice."

"I will think it over—thank you, thank you, Miss Bloyce, for your very good advice."

Mrs. Tresdaile's own firmness had been shaken a great deal by her last illness, or she would have never solicited and thanked me for my counsel. It was the old obduracy that led her to question Alice the first day of her convalescence, but it was only an imitation of her old hard manner—worn like a mask—that characterized the interview. Alice herself had no idea how close she had grown to the heart of her grandmother.

I was surprised to find, on proceeding upstairs, the object of my thoughts standing by the landing-window (before

which were some rusty geraniums and a dying myrtle) with her little hands before her face. The hands were dropped quickly as the rustle of my dress warned her of my approach, and with no effort at calmness then,—with her hands outstretched as though to thrust me from her, she cried out:—

“Don't follow me, Miss Bloyce—don't advance another step! I have borne enough to-day!”

“Will you not let me speak to you—tell you of the past?”

“No.”

“Will you not let me warn you in my turn—I have that to tell you which for your grandmother's sake I have kept back.”

“Miss Bloyce, you have kept back all affection, and deceived me. You have turned against your brother, and betrayed him! God knows what motives—mercenary or otherwise—have led you to this unnatural act; I cannot fathom them, and I would not be pained by your attempt at explanation.”

I started back—the cruel words pierced to my brain and robbed me of my strength.

“Mercenary!—deceived you!” I had only power to exclaim.

“Know this, Miss Bloyce, you have not gained one step,” she cried, with flashing eyes and heaving bosom; “you have but drawn me closer to him—there is no intrigue of yours can render me unfaithful to my promise. Go down with that thought, that defiance, and work your spells in vain!”

“Will you hear me?”

“May I never hear another word from your false lips!”

She sprang away, darted up the stairs, closed and double-locked the door against me. I could hear her pacing the room with passionate steps as I stood there conscious of being very white and agitated—conscious, too, that my enemies were rising round me, and all whom I had loved were fading fast away!

CHAPTER II.

"SHADOWS BEFORE."

My pride mortified, even my honesty suspected, the affection that had long been proffered Alice flung back again contemptuously, I should have gone away that night and left the world of scheming to itself, had it not been for Mrs. Tresdaile's weakness. Further excitement might have engendered serious consequences, and I was content to put off the day of my departure. Only put off, for I had resolved to go—could I remain beneath a roof where anyone mistrusted me?—to return to St. Bre-lade and the farm on its cliffs, to a home

in which no suspicion could lurk, and wait there for the next turn to my fortunes. I cannot say the resolution did not cost me a few pangs—but it was made!

Had I been a model heroine, it is probable that I should have sought Alice Tresdaile again, put up with a hundred indignities, harsh speeches and angry looks, and have insisted upon my explanations being heard; I believe that would have been a wiser course than nursing my own wounded pride and imitating Alice's reserve.

Ten days or a fortnight passed in a very unsatisfactory manner; Alice and I scarcely interchanging a word; Mrs. Tresdaile, to my great concern, showing further signs of weakness, but coming down to the drawing-room and to her post by the fire day after day, persisting with a strange obstinacy that she was getting better, stronger, and firing up with indignation at all mention of a doctor. Those who bore her name were solicitous concerning her; Alice was more often at her side, seemed endeavouring, by her love and gentleness—and what love and

gentleness she could testify at times! — to atone for the disobedience of the past, and all the doting love that the old lady had had for Alice before the great discovery shone out again. Bartholomew's concern for his grandmother's debility was strikingly manifest, and although he did not irritate Mrs. Tresdaile too much by his presence, yet he made inquiries of the servants at the door, or of me in the hall, and I never crossed the threshold the last three days of that fortnight without finding him in Stamford Street. Barnaby Tresdaile, too, made his re-appearance, had an interview with his grandmother, was sorry to see her looking so ill—*she wasn't ill!*—ah! was glad to hear she was not ill, very glad! Barnaby Tresdaile was looking well himself, although the secretaryship had not turned out quite so profitable as he had anticipated, and the new grand company which he had put in working order was getting out of order rapidly, and “making tracks” for the *Gazette*.

“I don't disguise the fact,” he said, in

answer to Mrs. Tresdaile's inquiries, "that my hopes have not been realized to their fullest extent, and that my post as secretary is not the firmest in the world. Never mind, things might have been worse."

"If you had married Miss Bloyce, you mean!" said the old lady, as sharply as ever.

I was in the room at the time, but Mrs. Tresdaile did not stand upon ceremony, or study my blushes much, which were reflected to such an extent on the face of her grandson that he became a bright vermillion.

"Exactly," said he, with a serio-comic look towards me; "things might have been worse. Miss Bloyce was quite right, and I was an old fool!"

"Quite in the right, too, Barnaby."

"Proud to find you the same opinion of myself, though it's a personal question," said Barnaby, briskly; "and as the story's ended, and the whole affair is bankrupt and wound up, we'll spare Miss Bloyce's feelings and say no more about it."

After Barnaby had left us that day, Mrs.

Tresdaile sent for her solicitors, and had another Will prepared. It was just as well—she had not been easy in her mind since I had destroyed the last Will at her dictation—would I be kind enough to keep out of the way with Alice till the lawyers had finished, and she had affixed her name to the deed?

The solicitors were there all the afternoon and evening. Mrs. Tresdaile's Will was a long one—required frequent alteration and grave deliberation, and Law got hungry over it, and required sherry and biscuits to support nature once or twice. The Will kept Mrs. Tresdaile thoughtful the remainder of the evening—kept her awake in her bed, too, for she came down next morning to breakfast haggard and red-eyed, complaining of a restless night.

“I never had a Will disturb me like this before, Miss Bloyce,” she said, when we were alone together; “will-making has been a matter of business with me, has not shaken my nerves or excited me in the least till now. It's very singular.”

I was wondering if George Keldon had been remembered in will the fifty-fifth, when a peculiar knock at the door, beginning boldly, and then suddenly coming to a stop, woke me from reverie, but kept George Keldon in my thoughts. For it was a knock I could imagine *him* making; a blundering nervous kind of knock, in which only people indulge who have something on their minds.

When the servant beckoned me from the room I was sure it was George Keldon before she had uttered a word.

"If you please, Miss Bloyce, I thought I'd just pretend it was some one for you, for it's the tall young man again that missus can't bear."

"Do you mean Mr. Keldon?"

"Yes, Miss Bloyce, that's his name. He wants to see Mrs. Tresdaile."

"I'll come down directly."

I stood hesitating on the drawing-room mat outside. Should I tell Mrs. Tresdaile or not?—would it excite her too much?—would she ever have the chance of see-

ing him again ! I returned to the room.

"Well, who is it?" asked Mrs. Tresdaile; "not your brother?" with a glance at Alice, bending over her work-table.

"No, madam; it's a gentleman to whom you are not partial. He is anxious to see you, but if you think the meeting will excite you, I'll tell him to call another time."

"Is it George Keldon, then?" was Mrs. Tresdaile's next question.

"Yes."

"What does he want?—who has told him that I have been ill and sent him cringing here?"

"Will you see him, Mrs. Tresdaile?"

"I was never afraid to see him yet—bad as he is!"

They were her old defiant words, but they were not uttered in the defiant spirit of the past. The words that followed, cruel and bitter though they were, were not delivered with that harsh emphasis which would have characterized them a few weeks ago.

"Perhaps he thinks to find me changed

—capable now of being preyed upon and talked over—it's a miscalculation! If I be not so strong in body, my hate for all who bear his name has not become more weak. Let him come up!"

She snatched her stick from the side of her chair, and planted it firmly on the hearth-rug, one yellow wrinkled hand leaning heavily upon it. As the brows contracted and the thin lips compressed, I could see the lines grow deeper in her face; see the whole face harden, as it were, with the remembrance of her fancied wrongs. It was a great effort to assume the woman of the past at that time—to show her grandson there was no sorrow, illness, anything could change her heart towards him.

I found George Keldon in the hall, twisting round in his hands a cap that was about the size of a little boy's, and looking down at his feet with a very grave expression. As I came into the hall he gave me a faint smile.

"It wasn't for ever, you see, Miss," said

he, alluding to our last dialogue on the East Hill, Hastings; "it's rather foolish to say what's for ever, and what isn't! I hope you're well."

"Is anything the matter?"

"Ay, or I shouldn't have come before my year was out," he answered; "will the old lady see me?"

"Yes," I said; "have you heard she has been ill?"

"No, no," he replied, absently; "ill, eh? —which way, upstairs?"

He went upstairs in a heavy plodding manner, his hands and cap in his trousers' pocket, his eyes following the worn pattern of the carpet all the way to the drawing-room door, before which he paused and looked at me.

"This room?"

"Yes, wait one moment," I said; "I had better tell Mrs. Tresdaile you are here!"

"Very well, Miss Bloyce."

He leaned against the wall and looked at his feet harder than ever.

So different from his usual manner, so dull and so dejected—the great eyes full of thought, the face usually so earnest now devoid of animation, and all its light and life quenched out! What could have happened to him?

I entered the room and remained standing by the door. Mrs. Tresdaile's effort was over, and there she sat, the firm upright old lady with the fierce expression, who had been the terror of her grandsons for thirty years or more.

"Where is he?"

"Outside the door," I answered; "may he come in now?"

"I said he might come in five minutes since," was the quick reply.

George Keldon had heard my answer, and, without waiting for my summons, had entered the room, bowed to Alice, advanced towards his grandmother, till a sharp "Keep your distance, sir!" arrested further progress.

"Well, what's brought you here—
anxiety?"

"Yes."

"Anxiety which keeps you from sleep, and robs you of your rest—which stays your hand at your work, and sets you thinking?"

"True enough," said Keldon, laconically.

"I should feel flattered, if I believed it."

"If you!"—cried Keldon, regarding his grandmother more attentively; "oh! I ask your pardon—I haven't been anxious about *you!*"

"Confound your impudence, sir, whom have you been anxious about?" exclaimed his grandmother.

"I was not aware you had been ill," said Keldon, evading the question; "or I might have been anxious, doubt it as you will. Illness drops down when we least expect it, takes a firm grip, and strikes us unmercifully. I see now—you are not looking so well as usual."

"Yes I am—better."

George Keldon drew his cap from his pocket, and twisted it round again in his hand, after this flat contradiction, looking

strangely—even wistfully—at Mrs. Tresdaile.

“You are always a long while beating about the bush, George Keldon,” said his grandmother; “if you would come to the point a little sooner, I should not think the worse of you. What are you here to-night for?”

“To ask a favour.”

“Of *me*!” cried Mrs. Tresdaile.

“Ay—of you. I haven’t too many rich relations to ask favours of,” he said, with a short laugh, the reverse of a merry one.

“Do *you* want money of me then?” asked Mrs. Tresdaile, becoming every instant more excited and surprised.

“A small sum—five guineas—four guineas—anything.”

“I don’t think you’ll get it—what’s it for?”

“For a physician—for a great man who can save life at its last gasp I’ve heard, if there’s a chance, the smallest chance, to cling to.”

“Who’s ill, dying?—your father, Keldon,” cried Mrs. Tresdaile, eagerly.

"The doctor says so," said Keldon, with a groan.

"And do you think after all the assertion of my wrongs, my hate, that I would so much as hold up a little finger to save his wretched life?"

"You never half meant what you said," said Keldon; "nobody does speak the truth when angry, you know!"

"I know this—you won't get four guineas out of me."

"It's not a large amount."

"You spent more on your country trip this year," said Mrs. Tresdaile.

"You're right," he answered; "had I known what was coming I should have been more careful. Since then I have got rid of all my spare cash, sold all the things that were saleable, pawned the rest, borrowed of Bar—of my friends, all that they had to spare!—mortgaged my wages, and now I have come to you. Can't help these things sometimes, and can't," looking very wild and fierce, "let the old man die for want of help, whatever comes of it!"

"Take him to the hospital."

"It's too late now."

Mrs. Tresdaile had no very consolatory reply on her lips when he interrupted her.

"Don't it strike you, grandmother, that I've been hard pushed for it to ask you for money?" he cried; "don't it strike you my father must have suffered a great deal in body, and his son a great deal in mind, before this step was taken? I feel a mean spirited cur enough, though its for his sake—had it been for me," very erect and stiff, "I might have died, but I wouldn't have come here!"

"It's very fine to talk," was the muttered response.

"Grandnother Tresdaile," said Keldon, in a hoarse voice; "I can't wait here. If he wakes and misses me, not all the nurses in Blackman's Gardens will keep him in his bed. The doctor said the stuff would make him sleep five hours at the least; before three out of them are gone I shall be in my room again. Is it yes or no?"

"No!"

"I left the old man dying in his bed. Say that he's an enemy of yours, has wronged you, robbed you, made your life a trial and a misery—what of it, now?"

"For anyone but him—for you, even," replied Mrs. Tresdaile, "if you will say it is for yourself alone, I'll give the money—fifty times the money—but for the man you plead for, not one farthing!"

"You have meant what you said more often than I thought!" said Keldon, looking at her again.

"We shall understand each other in time, sir."

"You're a harder woman than I thought—good-night!"

"Grandmamma," cried Alice, almost reproachfully.

"Good-night," repeated Mrs. Tresdaile; "tell your father—"

"Hold hard there!" cried Keldon, raising his hand; "he's past bearing messages to, and I wouldn't trouble him with one of yours if he weren't! I'm sorry, for *your* sake, you wouldn't help him—you're an old

woman, whose turn may come sooner than you think. No one knows, grandmother, how near he is standing to the brink!"

Two long strides took him out of the room, half-a-dozen more into the hall, whence he would have departed had not a lock, two bolts and an iron chain, prevented his precipitate retreat. He had surmounted the difficulty, however, and was stepping into the street, when I touched him on the arm.

"Ah! I had forgotten *you*, too, for the moment. Good-bye! What's this?"

"The five guineas which you asked Mrs. Tresdaile for. You mustn't judge her too harshly, Mr. Keldon—she has been very ill. You know how hard she is to move at times."

"Well," said Keldon, taking a long breath, and looking at the little paper parcel in his hand, "this is a strange way of coming round as ever I heard of—I'll just run up and thank her."

"No, no, go away, now,—it is getting dark. If your father should only wake!"

“Tell her I think it very kind, and ask her to forgive a rather unsettled grandson, if he has spoken his mind too plainly. She’s not so hard-hearted as she fancies herself—I knew she wasn’t all along. Here’s off—good-night!”

CHAPTER III.

THE EVENTS FOLLOW THE SHADOWS.

IT was a dull, gloomy evening after the candle-lamp was lighted, and the curtains drawn—an evening more calculated to produce a fit of the horrors than impress one with a sense of repose. We three women sitting in that old-fashioned drawing-room, spoke but little together, but sat each occupied with her own thoughts and let time drift on its way noiselessly. I did not fulfil to perfection the duties of a companion that evening, but I had an idea that reflection was the best thing for Mrs. Tresdaile, and seeing her inclined for it I made no effort to dis-

turb her. She thought very deeply too, and forgot us both; went away to a world of her own creation, and lived therein, playing her part with the shadows. Shadows of the past, when she was younger and had a daughter at her side—shadows nearer the present, but still of that past which never ceased from haunting her, when the daughter had gone from home—nearer yet, when the daughter was in her grave, and the grave had not cancelled the injury. Were there any sadder, better thoughts that night to make her look so strangely mournful at the fire, and to completely shut her from us—old thoughts, before her heart was wounded and money was so near it?—I believe so!

Alice sat as silent as her grandmother; her busy fingers knitting at some fancy work, her thoughts far away too from present company. Had we been "friends," I might have intruded on *her* reverie, but she had turned from me and distrusted me, and my pride would not make the first advances. Doubtless, at that time, I was

her one great enemy who had sided with the old and suspicious, and left those young and ardent as myself to troubles which I might have softened. Oh! I was a bad sister and a false friend, and she had been very much mistaken in me!

It was striking ten o'clock when Mrs. Tresdaile dropped her stick into the fireplace, and made two hearts at least jump into the like number of throats.

"Will you have any supper to-night, Mrs. Tresdaile?" I asked.

"No."

"Miss Alice?"

"No, thank you. It is getting late," said Alice, wearily; "I think I will go to my room."

"I shall want a little conversation with you in the morning, Alice," said Mrs. Tresdaile to her grand-daughter; "will you come early to me?"

Alice inclined her head in assent, but said—

"I hope one painful subject is not to be renewed, grandmamma?"

"No, no, *that* is over," replied Mrs. Tresdaile, "never to be renewed again, my dear. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

As Alice stooped and kissed the withered cheek, Mrs. Tresdaile took the hands of her grand-daughter in hers, and repeated her "Good-night!" in a low tone.

Alice responded again with some surprise, then went out of the room, favouring me at the same time with a distant bow.

Mrs. Tresdaile turned quickly to me.

"It's about you, Miss Bloyce."

"Indeed, madam."

"You and Alice haven't been friends since your brother was foiled in the midst of his plotting," said she; "there's a distance widening between you every day. I don't like to see it."

"I fear it is beyond your power, Mrs. Tresdaile, to make that distance less."

"No, no, I hope not," said my mistress; "for you are Alice's best friend. Let her lose you when I am gone, and she is lost herself."

"There will be her brother; I could not stay. Besides," I said, with a lightness I was far from feeling, "*you* must not talk of leaving us now you are getting well."

"'You are an old woman, whose turn may come sooner than you think!'" responded Mrs. Tresdaile, in the words of her grandson.

"All our turns may, madam," was my answer.

"He spoke them angrily but heartily," said Mrs. Tresdaile; "they have kept my brain busy to-night; I can hear them singing in it now."

"I would not let them trouble me," I answered; "shall I read to you, madam?"

"No," she answered; "it would not interest me—besides, I want to talk about him."

"About George Keldon?"

"Yes."

"It will be a painful subject for you," I said, "and the hour is a late one."

"He is my daughter's son," she said, paying no heed to my remarks; "he has my

daughter's eyes! I can see her now, a little girl with chestnut hair—it is not so many years ago since she was at my side, and I loved her with all a mother's jealous fondness. Miss Bloyce, it was for Alice's sake I refused the money for George Keldon's father; to show her how I treasured a wrong, and never forgave a deceit practised against me. There is nothing like example!"

"But that example may be the poor man's death."

"No, no, my physician shall go directly. I will send round a messenger to him when the house is quiet, and Alice is asleep. I have intended it the last two hours."

"But—"

"But the doctor said he would sleep five hours," interrupted the old lady; "the physician will be there in time; don't get fidgety, Miss Bloyce."

"George Keldon will not forget your kindness."

"That's the worst of it," replied Mrs. Tresdaile; "that's where I feel it most."

For thirty years he has been in awe of me, and, despite his efforts to believe the contrary, has thought me cruel and inflexible. For thirty years have I struggled to be as unrelenting as I seemed, and stifled every weakness in its birth. I have shunned him, and tried to hate his name, taught myself to think that I hated him, believed it, too—till now!”

“And now you think of him as your daughter's child—you can forget the past and forgive one who made it full of bitterness,” I cried. “Oh! Mrs. Tresdaile, I am so glad to hear you speaking from the heart!”

“She was so like my Alice,” murmured my mistress, reverting again to the one subject of her daughter; “it was for her sake I loved Alice, and kept her by my side. It was beginning life again, until,” flashing up for a moment, fiercely, “your brother came, and tried to rob me of my grandchild. If I should live to—”

She stopped, and held up a finger to enjoin silence.

"What is it, ma'am?"

"The bell ringing—don't you hear?"

I did not hear. I sat silent also, waiting to hear the servants in the hall, or a repetition of the summons. I sat so long, that I was inclined to believe it was Mrs. Tresdaile's fancy, when there came at last the faintest summons at the bell.

"The women are asleep downstairs—we'll open the door to him ourselves," said Mrs. Tresdaile, rising.

"To him—to whom?"

"George Keldon," answered Mrs. Tresdaile; "he has come to tell us of his father's death."

"You had better let me go alone."

"No, I will accompany you," said Mrs. Tresdaile, firmly.

I could not help remembering the nervous excitement of Mrs. Tresdaile on the first night of Alice's arrival, and contrasting it with her present self-possession. We went downstairs together, she for the first time in my recollection requiring the assistance of my arm in her descent, which was even

then made with much difficulty and frequent pausing. She was very weak that night.

"Shall I ask who is there?" I said, when we were in the hall.

"No."

I withdrew the fastenings and opened the door. It was George Keldon standing outside, who came into the hall, who glanced at his grandmother, and did not appear surprised to find her face to face with him.

"Well?" said Mrs. Tresdaile.

"Not well—but bad," answered Keldon, hoarsely; "here, grandmother, I've brought your money back — he's past physician's cure!"

"He's dead, then?"

"Ay, and if ever man went to heaven yet, gone upwards!" said Keldon, solemnly; "gone with his long-suffering, his untiring patience, his love for me, his confidence in God. No one knew him but me, or judged him rightly — you, Mrs. Tresdaile, have misjudged him all your life

No one knew or cared for him but me!" he cried again, passionately, "and it is only I shall miss him!"

He flung his cap on the floor, picked it up again and wiped his eyes with it, once more extended the little packet of money to his grandmother.

"Take it—there's a burial club will do the rest. I don't want this money—I won't have it!"

"It is not mine," said Mrs. Tresdaile.

"Then—*then it's yours!*" cried Keldon, turning round to me; "I see it all now—ah! it was like you! A thousand thanks, Miss Bloyce."

He pressed the money back into my hand; he wrung my hand in his excitement till I winced with pain.

"There, I've hurt you," said he, dropping my hand hurriedly. "God bless you, I didn't mean that. It's like me, always clumsy! Did you speak?" turning round to Mrs. Tresdaile.

"So, he's gone at last!" was the muttered observation of my mistress as she stood in

the hall, tracing mysterious characters on the floor-cloth with her stick.

"Never to come back!" was Keldon's answer.

"It is not so many years ago since he was a young, handsome man—since I forbade him this house, and told him to come no more after your mother," said Mrs. Tresdaile; "and now I have outlived him, and he will trouble me no more!"

Keldon turned to the door. He was in no mood to listen to Mrs. Tresdaile, and doubted how far he could trust himself with a reply.

"Keldon," called Mrs. Tresdaile. He stopped and looked back at his grandmother.

"You were talking about money an hour or two since, complaining of the difficulties in which your father's illness had involved you—"

"Not complaining!"

"No matter, you are in difficulties—come upstairs with me!"

Keldon shook his head.

"I offer to forget; I offer you my help,

and you refuse it!" cried she, warmly.

"My right hand will not fail to help me honestly," said Keldon.

"Is it dishonesty to touch my money?"

"Dishonesty to him you would not help, who is lying dead in Blackman's Gardens," he replied. "It may be superstition, but I fancy he is standing by me now and whispering, 'Don't touch her money!'"

"Are you going away in a bad spirit at such a time as this?" said Mrs. Trésdaile; "is there not opportunity now for you and me to know each other better?"

Keldon looked surprised, but he shook his head and said, "Too late!"

"Say that he is standing at your side still," she added, earnestly; "but not that he whispers to my daughter's child, 'Turn from her as she turned from you!' Let him stand there a witness to a better feeling between us from this night!"

"Why—why, what does all this mean?" cried Keldon.

"I would be at peace with you and all the world—I would forget!"

She dropped her stick and extended both her arms. Keldon strode back and clasped her to his breast.

"I'm very weak—will you see me to my room?"

Grandmother and grandson went upstairs slowly together, I following with the light. So long asunder, together now at last!—the old feud ended, and the ties of relationship acknowledged!

"Why, this is as it should be, grandmother," said Keldon.

"Yes, yes," returned Mrs. Tresdaile, "as it should be!"

When we were before the drawing-room door again she pointed up the stairs to her own room. Slowly together went the old lady and her grandson, I still following.

"You have been in my thoughts a great deal lately, Keldon—but *only* in my thoughts!"

"I am hard of understanding to-night," said Keldon, "or—"

"Or I speak in riddles," answered his grandmother.

Before the door of her own room she said again :—

“Keldon, you are very poor—I must help you now.”

“Not to-night.”

“It will be justice—*atonement*, grandson.”

“No.”

“It may be too late to-morrow!”

Still Keldon shook his head.

“You’re as obstinate as a pig!” ejaculated Mrs. Tresdaile, in her old sharp manner.

“Some other time—some other time!” he said, soothingly; “I am troubled to-night, you know—my head aches—my heart’s heavy. I think I must say good-night now.”

“Good-bye!”

“Good-night!”

“*Good-bye!*” she insisted on repeating.

“See George Keldon out, Miss Bloyce,” said Mrs. Tresdaile, “and then come to my room again—I wish to speak to you.”

When I had lighted Mrs. Tresdaile’s night-lamp, I saw George Keldon to the street-door, and stood by it whilst he re-

mained in a thoughtful attitude on the steps without.

"Miss Bloyce," he said, suddenly looking up, "I'm clean dazed to-night; everything is in a mist, and nothing seems natural, or as it was before. Does it strike you the old lady is much changed?"

"Yes."

"I did go upstairs with her, didn't I, or have I been wandering in my head?"

"You went upstairs."

"And I'm going back to *him*, and the poor old face won't brighten up to see me any more!—good-night, good-night!"

When I had locked the door, I repaired to Mrs. Tresdaile's room. I found my mistress sitting before the fire, which had been lighted for her an hour or two ago, her thin hands spread before the blaze.

"Miss Bloyce, I shall want you to go out."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to the lawyer's—that Will which troubled me so yesterday must be altered."

"I am sure, my dear Mrs. Tresdaile, you cannot endure any more fatigue."

"It *must* be altered if I die over it—just a codicil, Miss Bloyce."

"Surely, to-morrow—"

"To-morrow will not do, and yet—"

She paused, and looked at me.

"And yet if anything did happen I might trust you; he wouldn't starve at least—and to-night I am so weary! Miss Bloyce," said she, "I have bequeathed you in that last Will of mine five thousand pounds."

"Oh! my dear mistress, I wish you had not!—what will they say—what will they think!"

"You have been a good and faithful friend the little time we have been together—you deserve it, and it is not much for me to leave you."

"And—and George Keldon?"

"Receives no legacy, and is not mentioned in the Will! It is that which I am anxious to alter, if I dared tax my strength so far to-night. Miss Bloyce, if anything were to happen before morning, can I trust you to save him from penury, and share with him your legacy?"

"Were anything to happen—which I do not think, which I pray may not, he shall have every penny."

"Stay, stay," cried Mrs. Tresdaile; "you defeat my own intentions—the half, and only half."

I complied with her request.

"You are the only one I can trust to keep faith with me—all the rest have weak minds, bad hearts, or bad advisers. It is hard that you should receive the least for services the most faithful, but it is only for to-night. To-morrow, weak or strong, be it equal to my strength or too much for it, I'll make another Will."

"May I ask if you feel ill to-night, madam?"

"More weak and tired than ill."

"Will you let me fetch the doctor—the physician?"

"To-morrow, perhaps, if this sinking at the heart continues—it may be only fancy, or perhaps hearing of death has made me miserable. Do I look ill?"

"Pale, I think—yet still not very ill."

"What a many things I have put off till the morrow," she murmured; "my talk with Alice, my will, the doctors — and if that morrow never comes!"

"I do not like to leave you with these morbid thoughts, Mrs. Tresdaile."

"Will you stay with me one hour, while I sleep before the fire—sleep off my fancies and my nervousness?"

"Will you not go to bed?"

"In an hour — when I feel stronger!"

She dropped off to sleep as she spoke, and I sat watching her with a beating heart. She was so different in her manner — she had altered so — she was so gentle, and spoke so kindly to me! And yet was there anything to fear? — or was it fancy, born of the sad news George Keldon brought to Stamford Street?

She spoke a little in her sleep, which was a restless one — she talked of Alice, of Keldon, of her money, which she counted up by thousands, and then moaned over, as though it weighed upon her heavily. Then suddenly, as I watched, she opened

her grey eyes again and looked at me so strangely, that my heart beat no longer rapidly, but for a moment stopped.

"*Alice!*" she whispered.

"Are you ill—do you wish to see her?"

"I should like to see her once — again."

"Oh! no, no—not once again, dear madam — honoured mistress — not *once* again!"

She pointed to the door, and I flew out across the landing, into Alice's room, shook her from her dreams to consciousness.

"Oh! Alice, Alice, wake up!—your grand-mamma is ill! She wants to see you!"

"Very ill?" cried Alice.

"I fear so."

Back again to the room I had quitted—Alice and I—before the chair wherein I had left her waiting so patiently. So still and patient now—so awfully still!

"Asleep!" said Alice, kneeling down and looking into the calm, white face.

"Oh! Barbara," in a strange hushed whisper, "is this sleep?"

"Alas! the sleep that knows no waking!"

CHAPTER IV.

“HEREIN IS CONTAINED THE WILL OF SARAH
JANE TRESDAILE.”

THERE was grief in the house of Tresaile. Grief, for Alice had not been insensible to the many proofs of her grandmother's affection, could not sit down dry-eyed with the knowledge that the eldest of her name had been suddenly snatched from the ranks of the living. She had been her true friend, and it was her first great loss; for her own mother had died when she was a child, and the pale, delicate face of that mother bending over her cot-side was but a misty remembrance.

Alice's nature, as the reader is aware, was an impulsive one, and the first outburst of her grief was painful to witness—it bore down my reserve, and for the time drew me to her side, and set me the task of consoler. Of my own sorrow for the loss of one who had been kind to me, and who had so carefully hidden the real goodness of her heart beneath the cloak of acerbity, I did not speak to Alice, and Alice did not appear to think of it.

There was bustle in the house of Tresdaile, too; the ill news was soon spread, and Bartholomew, Barnaby, and many relations of whom I had not before heard, crowded the house the next day, hurried from room to room, consulted, and argued, and quarrelled with one another. Grandmother Tresdaile had left no small amount of worldly goods behind her; she had been a careful, close-fisted woman all her life, had not thrown away many pence on the pomps and vanities of the world, had never indulged in a taste for dress, and did not know what display meant. Her business was

a large one, the profits were large also, and Mrs. Tresdaile had added week by week to the store in the hive, till the hive had grown full and there was no hiding the gold that oozed from its pores. Every relation of the name of Tresdaile, all the fifth and sixth cousins, who had taken other names, or had other names forced upon them, could tell fabulous stories of "Grandmother's Money;" each person who came to the house had some visionary idea that he was down for a handsome sum in the will, and could relate wonderful anecdotes of the old lady's affection for him. The grandsons would be provided for doubtless, but there was plenty to spare from the hoard, and not a kinsman would be forgotten.

George Keldon had come with the rest; had gone upstairs softly as though his tread might awaken her, and had stood, cap in hand, reverently gazing on her who made friends with him at the last.

"I'm glad we parted friendly after all Miss Bloyce," were his only words before he left that day.

I need not say Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile was busy, and was very important in the midst of the bustle he created at No. 502, Stamford Street. He took the general management of the establishment, sealed up all boxes and drawers, pocketed his late grandmother's keys, and quite, by his airs of authority, deceived the rest of his relations, Barnaby included.

Every relation was invited to the funeral by Bartholomew; it was befitting that proper respect should be paid to the dear departed, even if he had to order fifty mourning coaches! Besides, if all the relations were to hear the Will read, there would be an end to suspicion and uncertainty, although he had no doubt the dissatisfaction in consequence would be highly developed.

An act of real service Bartholomew Tresdaile performed: he warded off an inquest, and spared us the pain of a public inquiry. He satisfied the curious, he procured the certificate of Mrs. Tresdaile's late medical adviser, who was not at all surprised at the

news, and had feared Mrs. Tresdaile was very rash (he wouldn't say uncourteous, now, poor lady!) in telling him not to bring himself or his nasty mixtures to No. 502 again! Bartholomew Tresdaile was also general manager at the funeral, to which the relations mustered in great force—those of the masculine gender quarrelling in the mourning-coaches all the way to the grave, and hardly kept from punching each others' heads all the way back; those of the feminine gender taking possession of the drawing-room, and worrying me and Alice with their incessant talk. Such canting talk, such hypocritical condolence, such worldly eagerness, standing out sharp and prominent from the thin veil of true charity — such false tears for the dead, and such true prayers for the MONEY!

It was a large assemblage in the drawing-room that evening, an anxious crowd of men and women of the world. When Bartholomew laid the Will upon the table, chairs were drawn closer to the centre of

attraction, and the hum of voices nearly ceased. The only face that betrayed no nervous excitement was George Keldon's, which I could see, very calm and grave, over the heads of about half-a-dozen gentlemen who were standing by the door, hard-up for chairs.

There was no more seat-accommodation; even some old wooden chairs from the kitchen were on active service in the drawing-room — two rickety ones sustaining three fat old ladies from the country, and threatening to interrupt future proceedings in a very unseemly manner.

“‘Herein is contained the Will of Sarah Jane Tresdaile,’” said Bartholomew, reading the cover of the document, in a loud voice. “Is it your pleasure, ladies and gentlemen, that I should read this Will?”

General assent, chairs drawn close together, gentlemen by the door and on the landing with their hands to their ears, the two rickety seats creaking ominously and keeping me watchful and alarmed.

Bartholomew Tresdaile broke the seal,

opened the Will, went through a few contortions before settling himself comfortably — then laid the document down again, and looked in a surprised manner towards the door.

“Who are you, sir?” he exclaimed at last.

“Don’t mind me,” returned a sharp wiry voice; “I’m in nobody’s way.”


“Are you one of the family, sir?”

“Oh! yes.”

“Well that don’t much matter,” said a jocular cousin from the distance, a remark which elicited a little merriment. There’s a great deal of humour at funeral parties, sometimes.

“He’ll be as well off as some who are not, you mean,” said Bartholomew; “very likely — but still, as I thought the circle was complete before, it’s right and proper to—”

“It’s all right,” said Barnaby, “go on.”

Barnaby was standing beside the new-comer, and had spoken a few words to him. The new-comer, who had pushed his way 

the front, nodded his head and said, "Go on!" likewise. He was a young man, short of stature and slim of figure, with a thin swarthy face, very stubbly black hair, a hooked nose of the true Tresdaile type, and grey eyes which shone keenly enough through a pair of steel-framed spectacles. He stood foremost of the group, perfectly cool, composed and attentive to the proceedings; one small sunburnt hand upon his walking-cane, the other holding his chin as though he were afraid of dropping it. I glanced at Alice, but she had not been interested in the stranger, whose sudden presence there had suggested no thoughts of one very near and dear to her.

The reading of the Will commenced, and all the tedious preamble was more tediously got over, Bartholomew reading slowly and losing his place continually. The first legacy surprised every one but me, would have surprised me most of all, had not the almost dying words of my poor mistress prepared me for it.

"To my faithful companion, Barbara

Bloyce, late of St. Brelade, Jersey, and at present of Stamford Street, Blackfriars, the sum of five thousand pounds.'"

The announcement was nearly the death of Bartholomew—he doubled up on such an extensive scale.

"God bless my soul, it's a deal of money!" he muttered.

There were several angry glances in my direction—everybody there could read *my* story, see through the game I had been playing, know for what I had been a faithful companion and the best of friends! Alice did not raise her eyes from the worn pattern of the carpet, but I could see the face change, and I knew the old thoughts of me had all come back. It was the price for the side I had taken in her love struggles—it ended all mystery at once!

The new-comer turned round and said something to Barnaby, evidently about me, for Barnaby nodded, and the grey eyes of the stranger were fixed for some minutes in my direction.

"I give and bequeath to Bartholomew" "

—continued the eldest grandson—“‘to Bartholomew,’” he repeated, in a bewildered manner, “‘the sum of five thousand pounds and a third share in the stock, profits, proceeds and debts of my manufactory in London’—damn it!”

“Excuse me,” said the young man with the spectacles, “I didn’t catch you exactly—damn what did you say?”

“Never mind what, sir—perhaps you, sir, for interfering,” bawled Bartholomew; “I say this,” suddenly altering his mind, but not his temper, “that I have been the making of that manufactory, slaved my life out for it, and ought to have had it all, sir—was promised it all, sir—should have had it all, sir, if it had not been for this ridiculous and insane Will! If there is nothing more left to me,” he cried, foaming at the mouth, “I’ll fling the whole lot into Chancery—I will, by—”

“We can’t tell what is left anybody if you won’t read it, my good fellow,” said the young man; “go on, if you please, and take it quietly.”

"I should like to know who *you* are, sir?"

"You are coming to my name presently," was the reply.

"How do you know?" cried Bartholomew, suspiciously.

"Well, that is, if Mrs. Tresdaile's promises stand for anything."

"But they don't."

And having shut up the stranger by that answer, he resumed the reading of the Will.

There followed a bequest to her grandson, Barnaby Tresdaile, the sum of fifteen thousand pounds, and a third share in the profits, &c., &c., of the tobacco manufactory; and Bartholomew ground his teeth over the particulars of the legacy, and forgot to double up in his indignation. A like sum, the house in Stamford Street, and the remaining share of the business, was apportioned to Ernest Tresdaile, who, if he were the young man in the spectacles, received the intelligence unmoved and continued nursing his chin, and looking straight before him.

“To Alice Tresdaile, my dear granddaughter, the yearly interest on the sum of eighteen thousand pounds, invested in my name in the Three-per-cent Consols, *so long as she remains unmarried to Mr. Andrew Bloyce, of Clouden Terrace, Pimlico, and formerly of St. Brelade, Jersey*; but in the event of her marriage with the aforesaid Andrew Bloyce, such sums, and all interest that may arise from the same, to become the sole property of my grandson, Bartholomew Tresdaile, his heirs, successors and assigns.’”

Alice crimsoned at this home-thrust to the interests of my brother, Andrew, whose name suddenly appearing in the midst of the Will caused a general start, and an exchange of inquiring glances. The thoughtful old lady had resolved to try the affections of Alice's betrothed to the utmost—could she have adopted a more effectual test?

There followed a few legacies to the servants, and one distant relation who had not troubled Mrs. Tresdaile very often with

begging letters and was possibly fond of smoking, was left a hundred pounds in cash and a bale of tobacco, but the host of hungry harpies assembled there was passed over in silence. The fortune was apportioned, and Ernest and Barnaby Tresdaile, as executors to the will, were to sell the house-property, to convert the tobacco manufactory into ready cash, and to see to the fair disposal of the money.

When Bartholomew Tresdaile had concluded the perusal of the Will, he sat all of a heap on his chair like a hunchback, and paid no attention to the angry discussions around him. It did not matter to him if there were fifty as disappointed as himself—Grandmother's Money had been the hope of his life, had gilded his day-dreams, kept his heart full and his brain busy—it had lain before him as a fair landscape from his boyhood, and the temptation and desire it had engendered had grown with his growth, and narrowed his soul.

Some of the relations began to vanish down the stairs without the ceremony of leave-

taking, George Keldon one of the first. Alice and I, Barnaby, Bartholomew and the gentleman in the spectacles, retained our respective and thoughtful positions till the room was nearly empty.

"Well," said Barnaby, waking up first, "it's an extraordinary Will that pleases everybody, and I'm sorry to see the ill-feeling it has created amongst those who have gone downstairs. Come, Bart., you have no cause to look despondent—if you were poor Keldon, now!"

"Keldon did not serve his grandmother all his life, and receive her promise of support," grumbled Bartholomew.

"No, but you are not forgotten, like Keldon," said Barnaby; "I have no doubt our dear grandmother acted all for the best—thought you had plenty of capital, and could put up with an equal share of the business, and one-third of the ready-money."

"Grandmother Tresdaile never thought about the matter," said Bart, savagely; "she has been out of her mind the last

two years—I have twenty people to prove it.”

“You don’t think any such nonsense as that!” cried Barnaby.

“I should get my share, then—I’ve been robbed of it now.”

Bartholomew was too mortified and excited not to betray his thoughts, and, perhaps, there was little to be gained by not coming out in his true colours. He flung the Will on the table passionately, and the young man in the spectacles took it up and put in his pocket. The action did not escape the eldest grandson.

“You’d better drop that,” said he.

“I think I have the greatest right to it—at all events, my co-executor and I have.”

“Ernest Tresdaile!” cried three voices.

“Yes.”

“You’ll have to prove it before you go away with that Will in your pocket,” said Bartholomew.

“I’m not going away—I intend to stop here.”

“Ernest—my brother Ernest,” exclaimed

Alice rising, and advancing timidly towards him.

He was not a young man of an excitable temperament—the sight of a sister, he had seen last as a little child with sunny ringlets, did not appear to affect him much, or he had the enviable art of repressing his emotions in public. He took her trembling hands in his, kissed her on the forehead, said, “Don’t disturb yourself, Alice,” in a gentle tone, placed a chair for her, and then turned to Bartholomew again.

“With regard to proving my identity, cousin Bartholomew,” said Ernest Tresdaile, “that is easy enough, and but business. I see you are a business man; we shall agree very well together.”

Bartholomew’s passion was rapidly subsiding; he was recovering from the shock he had received, and all his cautious thoughts were falling back into their place. There was nothing to be gained by an exhibition of ill temper, and what might not fall in his way and actuate his future course, if he kept himself cool?

"Just as a matter of business, then," said Bart., "in the course of half an hour or so. You need not wonder at my outburst," he added, half surlily—"for I haven't been treated well by the old woman. I don't say she was exactly mad, but she had her fits of aberration, and if she wasn't suffering from one when this Will was thought of, I'm standing on my head! Has she treated any of us well—has she treated Miss Alice well, after all her protestations of esteem and love? Was it right to bind her to give up her future husband; to make her lose her legacy, or break her plighted, *sacred* word."

Bartholomew looked from under his brows, in his peculiar manner, at Alice; he was speculating on his chance of that wind-fall in the good time to come,—I could see it in his eyes. Ernest was a true Tresdaile, sharp and clear-sighted as the rest of them—there was the family look upon his face as he said, carelessly,

"That's a bit of nonsense for ~~me~~ sister and me to talk over. Love is all ver~~y~~."

well, but eighteen thousand pounds is much better — we'll change the subject, it is a delicate one."

Too delicate for Alice, for with a lip quivering with indignation, she had already quitted the room. It was not long before I followed her, and left the grandsons together—three shrewd men of the world.

Alice had not gone to her dressing-room—I found her crying in the dark, front parlour, lighted alone by the street-lamp from the opposite side of the way.

"May I come in, Alice?"

"If you like."

They were the old tones before we had knelt and prayed together on that memorable night week—the cold distrustful tones which had sunk freezing to my heart.

"Alice, I thought our recent loss had cancelled much of the past; hoped that you had learned to judge me justly, and would have listened at a time more fitting to my story."

"I have no desire to hear it," was the answer; "I am satisfied!"

"My story shall not be forced upon you," I returned; "I will go away and keep it locked within my breast."

"You must not go away believing in success," cried Alice, passionately; "whenever that day of parting comes, believe that you have left me penniless, and that that mercenary man upstairs takes the money as his right."

"You must love my brother very dearly, Alice," I said, sadly.

"He will prove himself no fortune-hunter now," she said, warmly; "he will take me for myself alone, and put to shame your ungenerous suspicions. It will be a happy day when he does that—he is my only friend, I feel it now too well! My brother Ernest comes back the cold-hearted, unsympathetic being I have always feared."

"I don't think your brother should be judged yet, Alice," I replied; "it is your weakness to judge, or rather suspect, too readily. Fearing your brother before one interview or explanation, believing me to have intrigued against your happiness, and

prompted your best friend in the last Will she has left behind, and, worse than all, forgetting in your fancied wrongs that best friend's memory already—oh! Alice, is this right?"

"If wrong, it is not your place to school me," she cried, dashing the bright drops from her eyes with an impetuous hand; "you fear *your* brother, and believe him all that is dishonourable and bad."

"No, God forbid that!" I answered; "I but fear his power to resist temptation, whatever shape it may assume."

"You have no confidence in him?"

"Not now!"

"You have betrayed him and me, and thrown aside our love," she said; "it is no longer your place, your right, to interfere between us. We have chosen our path, you have fixed on yours—which will lead to happiness the future must decide."

"In that future, Alice, you will think better of me," I replied.

I left her in the dark parlour and ascended to my own little room on the second

floor, glad to escape from the toil and worry of the day into quietness,—where I could think on, undisturbed, of what had happened before the chain was broken and the links all scattered.

CHAPTER V.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS.


I WAS not downstairs so early the next morning but that Mr. Ernest Tresdaile was before me. I found him in the front parlour where I had left Alice the preceding night; found him moving restlessly to and fro, examining the furniture of the room, the ornaments on the mantelpiece, taking up and laying down a few old books on the sideboard, and looking with a critical eye at the silver tea-spoons on the breakfast-table. He certainly inherited some of his grandmother's curiosity.




He nodded towards me as I entered the room.

"Miss Bloyce, I believe?" said he, smiling.

I bowed an assent.

"An old friend of my grandmother's, I presume?"

"I was Mrs. Tresdaile's companion— think I may add, her friend."

"No doubt, no doubt of that," he  said, quickly; "pray be seated, Miss Bloyce. It will be a pleasure and an  honour to make your acquaintance. Will  my sister Alice be long before she joins us?"

"She is generally downstairs by eight, sir; but if you wish to see her before, I—"

"No, no, you misunderstand me," he cried; "I had the pleasure of seeing and welcoming my sister at a late hour last night, after I had bidden adieu to my cousins. I kept my brotherly affections and tenderness in the background till I was alone with the sensitive little puss. This morning, after ascertaining from the housemaid you were an early riser, I came down at seven, expressly to be alone with *you*."

He spoke in an easy, natural manner,

and without any intention of embarrassing me.

"Of course, there is a great deal I can ask my sister about you, exactly as there is a great deal I can ask you about my sister. Will you be seated?—thank you."

Mr. Ernest Tresdaile seated himself opposite me, crossed his legs, rested one elbow on his knee, and took his chin into his hand again. He was very fearful of that chin coming off.

"Miss Bloyce, I am a matter-of-fact man, with a great objection to beating about the bush," he began; "I go straight to the point if I can see my way clear — when it's rather misty, I seek a guide to indicate the way. It's rather misty now!"

"Do you wish me for your guide, sir?"

"If you please."

"So far as I can assist you, without betraying confidence, you may command me, sir."

"Thank you. In the first place, you will naturally imagine, Miss Bloyce, that I am

curious about my sister—for a matter-of-fact man of the world, whose feelings are not often disturbed, I may say anxious about my sister.”

“Surely Miss Tresdaile is the proper person to supply the kind of information you require.”

“Surely not!” he said, with a sharp little laugh, that was yet pleasant to hear; “at so early a stage of our reunion, almost of our acquaintance, it would be too authoritative to ask, and might prejudice my sister Alice against me.”

I sat silent; I did not know how to reply. Was not this the beginning of a fresh series of complications? To speak of Alice to her brother, was to make Alice believe I had begun to plan against her in a new direction. He saw my hesitation.

“I have not mixed much in the society of ladies, Miss Bloyce,” said he; “don’t understand all those fal-lal ceremonies which ladies seem to expect in this country. Yesterday evening I startled my sister by

an abrupt inquiry, to which she answered that it was a painful subject to discuss, and that you could reply to it far better than herself, being aware of her determination."

I felt relieved to hear that Alice herself had referred her brother to me.

"Now, about this love affair," continued he. "I was never in love myself—never want to be. Love's all very ridiculous and nonsensical, and may be painful while it lasts—especially to a girl, who has no business on her mind. This young spark of her's is your brother, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has proposed to her and been accepted, eh?"

"Yes."

"Proposed to her on the sly, and humbugged the old lady—eh? Ah! plain enough—and the old lady, naturally indignant, humbugged him in return, made his marriage with Alice an impossibility, or the money a bunch of grapes very high up on the vine—ha! ha!—not so bad. Well,

Alice will set your brother free, and that very shrewd cousin of mine—couldn't have selected a shrewder gentleman to see after my sister—won't pocket eighteen thousand pounds."

I did not answer, and he leaned a little forward and seemed to study me attentively.

He read my face correctly enough, for he said:—

"You think she *will* marry him? Pooh, pooh, might in a story-book, but it isn't in real life one flings away a fortune, and goes head first to the devil. Your pardon, Miss Bloyce, but poverty is the devil—the worst devil to fight against in this world, whatever it may be in the next."

"I do not think your sister is inclined to resign this engagement, Mr. Tresdaile," I replied.

"She referred me to you for her answer."

"It was a very firm one last night—'Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile would claim the money as his right.'"

"Oh! no he won't," replied Ernest coolly; "Alice isn't such a soft-headed simpleton, and I don't despair of talking her over. Miss Bloyce, will you oblige me with your brother's address?"

I gave him the address, and he noted it down very carefully in his memorandum-book.

"Perhaps I can talk him over, too, if he's not quite a fool," said Ernest Tresdaile, as he returned the note-book to the depths of his breast-pocket; "not considered very foolish—eh?"

"Not very."

"Rather wide-awake than otherwise I am inclined to think at present," said he; "there, I have to beg your pardon, I forgot you were his sister, and consequently on the enemy's side. Yet you can't be on the enemy's side either, or that five thousand pounds is an unaccountable legacy."

"Miss Alice is aware of my views on this match—they are very different from hers and yours. There is no occasion to repeat them now, I think."

"No, no," said he, quickly; "other people's views have never affected me much. I have a habit of judging for myself and forming my own opinions. Excuse my egotism, Miss Bloyce."

I bowed.

"In these days money is money," said the brisk young man—"and love is—moonshine. Alice must not take to moonshine for the sake of the romance of the thing—that won't do!"

"Supposing she remains firm, sir."

"Oh! bother, I won't think of that—a woman firm, ha! ha!"

Mr. Ernest Tresdaile's disparaging opinion of the firmness of our sex was somewhat shaken during the next few days. Alice continued true to her word, and thought of nothing but love in a cottage, and the satisfaction of making over to Bartholomew Tresdaile the neat little amount of eighteen thousand pounds. I believe, during those few days, her unromantic brother brought all his worldly arguments to bear on the one great question; but what was money to

Alice, her heart glowing with love and full of faith in her idol? Mrs. Tresdaile had not shaken her firmness; it was not likely one she feared less would overcome the strength of her will. Ernest Tresdaile shrugged his shoulders a little, but did not put himself out much, or exercise any airs of authority; he was always cool and self-possessed, took the troubles of life, its cares and its oppositions with composure—could not help even evincing some little admiration of his sister's inflexibility when his sister was not present.

"She's a Tresdaile, consequently as hard to move as a Jerusalem pony," he observed once to me; "well, I don't like her the less for it, although I shall be sorry to lose a sister, directly I have found her, in so reckless a fashion. I gave up my clerkship in an Indian counting-house for a home, a sister and grandmother; and now grandmother is gone, the sister is going, and there will be a home left with nobody in it—cheerful, eh?"

"I presume the marriage will not take place directly?"

"Certainly not," said Ernest; "there is the mourning to wear out, the duties of executorship to get settled, the future husband to see. That last point will soon be arranged."

I turned pale.

"Your brother has accepted my invitation, Miss Bloyce."

"Invitation, sir!"

"He dines here next Sunday," was the reply. "I am anxious to see my future brother-in-law, to tell him about Grandmother Tresdaile's money, and congratulate him on the small chance he has of ever getting any of it. I shall be charmed to see Mr. Bloyce."

He delivered the last observation in so peculiar a tone, that I instinctively glanced at him. But his was a difficult face to read, and seldom betrayed the feelings of its owner. There was the usual keen expression there, perhaps even a little less expression, as though he were trying to look more dull and stupid than nature intended. I took occasion, during that interview, to

allude to my resolution—my long-formed resolution—of leaving Stamford Street.

He evinced a little surprise at this.

“Pardon me—I thought you were a very dear friend of my sister.”

“I thought so once myself, sir,” I replied, with a sigh, “but time has convinced me to the contrary. Alice Tresdaile feels no happiness in my society; we sit at the same table with regret; coldness and reserve grow stronger every day, and become very hard to bear.”

“You women are terrible hypocrites,” said Ernest; “sharp as I think myself, I did not detect that coldness and reserve of which you speak. First time I have been done, by Jove!”

The idea of being “done” made Mr. Ernest Tresdaile exhibit some signs of vexation.

“What have you quarrelled about?—this model husband whom Alice is going to give eighteen thousand pounds for—this expensive luxury in trousers—eh? Well, Miss Bloyce,” he added, without waiting for an answer, “there’s nothing new in ladies’ little

differences. I don't see that that should put an end to your relations with my sister."

"Your sister mistrusts me, sir," I said; "thinks I have deceived her, declines my explanation, will be glad of my departure."

"And you are firm too, Miss Bloyce?"

"Yes, sir."

"Extraordinary place Stamford Street for strong-minded women!" he observed;

"when do you think of leaving us?"

"Next week, if possible."

"Mr. Barnaby and I can let you have your legacy of five thousand pounds by Friday next—will that be too late in the week, miss?"

I would have said there was no hurry for the legacy, had not the pale face of Keldon—the haggard-looking face I had seen on the night of Mrs. Tresdaile's death—rose up and checked me.

"Friday next will do, sir."

"Of course, if Mr. Bartholomew agitate Chancery, you will have to wait longer; but the last day or two, since he has heard some news from me—pumped some news out of me, *he* thinks—he has been quite a

gentle being. Never knew a more romantic man in my life, thinks the god Cupid worth two of old Cræsus!"

Mr. Ernest Tresdaile had given me food for reflection the remainder of the week; there was no getting Andrew out of my thoughts, he stood always foremost, that tall and handsome brother in whom I had had such trust! How should we meet now?—what would he think of me now he doubtless knew all through Alice's letters, knew how I had betrayed him, and blighted his hopes! I felt very much like a culprit when that Sunday came round, felt, with all my innocence and "best intentions," I should colour and look guilty the first moment we met.

And I *did* colour and tremble when Andrew came that afternoon at three—Ernest Tresdaile had altered the old-fashioned dinner hour—and he coloured, too, though he took my hand and said, "Well, Barbara," in a friendly tone. Not in the friendly tone of the past, however—my quick ears detected the great difference.

It was a strange, stiff dinner-party — though Ernest Tresdaile did his best to put my brother Andrew at his ease ; there was too much caution and careful fencing between the gentlemen. Andrew knew Ernest Tresdaile had especially invited him to study his character, and Ernest was aware that Andrew was putting on his best manners — his frank, easy manners — to please him. Alice said little ; she was happier than usual, for Andrew was at her side, the invited guest of the brother whom she was learning to love—who she was certain was beginning to love her. It might all end so happy now—like the last chapter of all the novels ; youth would marry youth for love, despising the grand chances in life and valuing money as dust, and everybody would cry, “ What a faithful couple !—what a dear loving pair !—how life-like and natural a story ! ”

Ernest sat mindful of everything through his spectacles, though he played the agreeable host to the best of his power ; not an action escaped him, and I have no doubt

this vigilance annoyed Andrew, though my brother no more showed his displeasure than the sea shows the dark ugly things flitting about in its depths. Alice and I left the gentlemen over their wine, and repaired to the drawing-room, where we sat as distantly gracious to one another as was compatible with two maidens suffering from reserve, misunderstanding, or "sulkiness." We both had a difficult part to play, for neither of us was made of the hardest material. Alice could say bitter, cruel words in the heat of passion, and stung by disappointment; but I believe they were quickly repented of, though her pride would not allow her to confess it. I was suffering from my wrongs, knew I had been undeservedly the object of suspicion, and yet my heart was very tender that day, for I did not know how the day might end for Alice or me. But Alice had no fears; no doubts of the future were troubling her; the wild rush of joys to *her* heart would not allow her at that time to be unnatural, and began to draw her to my side once more.

When all is well in the end, perhaps, thought Alice, and those who would have marred our happiness repent of their scheming, it is easy to forgive!

When those who believe in the False, thought I, are on the eve of awakening to that Truth which is so heart-rending and bitter, it is mercy to forget!

And yet, though our hearts were softened, we did not fly into each others' arms and make it up for ever; there was a barrier to break down, and neither would give the first stroke. Perhaps the time had not quite arrived.

When Ernest Tresdaile and my brother entered the drawing-room, the former said, in a cheerful tone:—

“Alice, come here, my dear.”

When she was by his side, he took her hand and placed it in her lover's, saying—

“I have entered into a full explanation with Mr. Bloyce—Mr. Bloyce is not afraid of losing a fortune, and prefers your hand to all the fortunes in the world. Take it, wise sir, I offer no opposition.”

"My dear Alice," murmured Andrew, bending over the little hand and raising it to his lips, "you did not fear my decision?"

"Not for an instant," she answered, her bright eyes shining through her happy tears.

So they were engaged: Ernest Tresdaile had considered my brother's explanations satisfactory, and there was no one now to stand between them. They sat by each other's side the remainder of that evening, lived in a world of their own, content with their hopes, trustful in their future, and—very bad company.

Mr. Tresdaile devoted his conversational powers to me, talked half humorously and half satirically of his sister and Andrew, talked of a great many things with his customary fluency, glancing now and then at the lovers. I looked towards them myself when they were too absorbed to notice me, thought what a handsome couple they were, and what a happy pair they might be some day! If I had been deceived in Andrew after all, if he were not

the fortune-hunter I had fancied him, and all had been manly, honest and straightforward, how unjustly I had judged him!

When Andrew rose to leave that night, Ernest Tresdaile said considerably:—

“Perhaps you would like a few minutes’ conversation with your brother, Miss Bloyce?”

“Thank you,” I said, rather nervously; “I will see him to the hall.”

When the drawing-room door had closed behind us, Andrew and I descended to the hall, Andrew going first, erect and silent. At every step I knew the face was darkening, was not surprised at the cold glance which met my own when we were standing where, a little while ago, Keldon had stood with his grandmother.

Was he taking off the mask that he had worn so long, or was he looking as he had a right to look at one who had injured and aspersed him?

“Has Mr. Ernest Tresdaile told you of my future intentions, Andrew?” I faltered forth.

"He has," was the distant answer.

"If I should not see you again, or should not have an opportunity of being alone with you again, are there any messages for home?"

"Not any."

He leaned his hand upon the table in the hall, and kept his eyes upon me; the handsome face so clouded, the high, white forehead full of furrows. My heart yearned towards him, for he was my only brother; long ago we had been such friends, such confidants—he had really loved me once, I knew!

"Am I to congratulate you on your engagement with Miss Tresdaile?" I asked; "and oh! Andrew," I added, more impetuously, "am I in the wrong? Tell me I am in the wrong—that you love Alice Tresdaile for herself, and can make any sacrifice for her?"

"I love her, and I have made the sacrifice—are you not aware of it, Miss Bloyce?"

The lip curled mockingly, the eyes began to gather fire.

"The past has been full of mystery, Andrew," I said; "I have tried to pierce the darkness and see light and hope around you. I have striven hard, oh! brother, to keep back suspicion, and I have prayed so earnestly!"

"Prayed for *my* welfare?"

"Yes. Your welfare is to be free from great temptation, not to barter away the best feelings of your heart, deceiving yourself—and others."

"And you, Barbara, doubtful of my intentions, only fearing, praying earnestly, hoping for the best, could not seek me out to solve the riddle, but must mar my love and fortune—letting suspicion harden in your mind till it betrayed and ruined me!"

"Oh! Andrew, is it the money you regret, then?"

"It is the loss of a sister I regret—nothing more."

"I am a sister still, with all a sister's love," I cried; "I have not betrayed you—my part has been a weak one, and there is

nothing I have done or said to blush at. And I *did* seek you, Andrew ; at your hotel in Hastings I saw you, heard your explanations."

His face flushed, but it might have been with anger. There was anger in his voice as he replied :—

"Miss Bloyce, I will explain now ! Uncertain of Alice's feelings then, I did not care to make confession till I was sure of her I loved. And I loved her for herself ; it was her youth, innocence, and beauty that won me, that have led me this day to choose her before all the world."

"Oh ! Andrew, you make me so happy !" I exclaimed.

"Let me finish, madam," he said, more harshly, fiercely still, "before you prate of happiness. I do not love her less without her money, but I am so much a money worshipper as to believe her rightful share would have made our future home more bright, kept me from temptation, opened to me an honourable career. All this you have helped to counteract by word and

sign, even by silence when a word in my favour, or in Alice's, might have saved us both from poverty. You did not wish me well, you took part against me, and I have done with you for ever!"

I trembled very much, I felt my knees knocking together, and my lips quivering; I had no voice for a reply.

"For ever!" he repeated; "if I never hear your voice, or see your face again, I shall be glad! They are the voice and the face of a false friend, and I will not have them near Alice or myself. You have deceived us all, and been rewarded by the mercenary woman whom you served—let that content you for a brother less in this world!"

The shadow of the money was still upon his heart—the rage he exhibited too plainly told me that! He was of a sanguine, impulsive temperament, and might have been moved by Alice's tenderness and youth, but it was not the thoughts of the future wife that were crossing his brain, and troubling it then. They

were cruel words—were poured so quickly, so vehemently, that I could but shrink from him as though I were the guilty thing he thought me, and had plotted against his every chance in life. It was hard to lose him—to feel he cast me aside, and spurned his sister's love—and the hot, scalding tears filled my eyes, and streamed upon my cheeks. I covered my face with my hands to hide my tears from him, and turned towards the stairs; another word from him would have made a child of me. I heard him cross the hall and open the street-door, then there was a pause, and I knew he was standing irresolutely and looking back at me. His heart had been a warm one once—he was not wholly bad—he would see his injustice towards me, and relent even at the last!—he would remember the days gone by, and how he loved me in them before he turned away!

But his arms stole not around me to draw me to his breast; no kind words fell like balm upon my soul—I was to be

alone in the great world! The door slammed noisily at last, and I started and looked round. He had gone!

CHAPTER VI.

MY LEGACY.

I WAS the first to receive a legacy. There was plenty of money to draw upon for the sum which poor old Mrs. Tresdaile had bequeathed me; and, after filling in a Somerset House form, and signing a Somerset House receipt, Mr. Ernest Tresdaile, and his co-executor Mr. Barnaby, handed me the sum of five thousand pounds, minus a legacy-duty of five hundred pounds, which that very greedy government institution just alluded to, gobbled up without so much as a thank you.

I wonder what becomes of all the legacy-

duty—the two, three, and ten per cent. black mail levied on the goods, chattels, real and personal estates of those taken from us? Whom does it fatten besides the slow-going, surly clerks who slap the doors in your face, fling forms at your heads, and wrench money from your hands?—how much of it is accounted for, and how much melts into thin air, and is never clutched at again?

It was a long time before the house property, the manufactory, and the tobacco stores at the docks were disposed of; it was wearisome work for the executors, and gave no small trouble to their solicitors and others, despite the opposition that had been threatened by Bartholomew being suddenly withdrawn.

I knew afterwards that Bartholomew Tresdaile had not lightly studied the chances of overthrowing his grandmother's Will. He had feared Alice Tresdaile, and had begun to plan and scheme for himself from the day of her arrival in Stamford Street. He had planned against her

too, and forced his friendship upon Andrew; and though everything had not turned out as he had anticipated, yet, after all, there was nothing to complain of. Andrew Bloyce had fallen in love with Alice Tresdaile it appeared, and there was no occasion to set in work that other and complex machinery, which was ready to make havoc with Grandmother's Money. Mad or not mad, it did not matter much now, and the scheming that began one Sunday when I went to church with him at Hastings was one iron less in the fire. Alice was engaged to Andrew Bloyce, his cousin Ernest had told him somewhat ruefully, and Grandmother Tresdaile might have been as mad as a March hare for what he cared.

Mad!—it was his firm opinion she was one of the wisest old ladies he had ever known in his life.

I had made arrangements for returning to Jersey, had written to my father and mother at St. Brelade informing them of my intention, and leaving all explanation

till the old roof was over my head again, and the faces of the loved were around me. Many things had helped to detain me longer than I had expected, but the day was fixed at last, and only two clear days in London were left me.


The first day, Saturday, was to be devoted to calling on Mr. George Keldon—I had written to him at Blackman's Gardens, informing him of my intention to visit him on particular business, between twelve and one o'clock of that day. I had felt very much inclined to start on the evening of the Friday, but I remembered Friday was an unlucky day, and so put off my journey till the morrow!

And when the Saturday morning came, and it was time to depart, I felt inclined to put off the day again, I was so nervous and trembling. Though anxious to give him the money, and tell him of the last wishes of his grandmother, I yet dreaded the interview, for some reason I could not explain to myself. I would have preferred taking Alice with me had we been friends, but

Alice had suspected my honesty, and my pride would not allow me to tell her what I was going to do with half the money bequeathed me—half the blood-money for betraying her!

When I was in the omnibus, with two thousand two hundred and fifty pounds in my pocket—holding the notes very tight, too, lest my opposite neighbour should make a dash in their direction—I was more nervous than ever; and when I was in Blackman's Gardens—where I never expected to be again—I had to lean against the rusty iron rail which kept people from falling into the ditch, and try to reason myself out of a violent palpitation of the heart.

‘Suppose I go home again, and send him the halves of the notes in one letter and the rest in another; write him a long, calm, lady-like epistle, and end the business that way?—it would save me the embarrassment of a private interview with a young man who could not always command his nerves, and was very strange in his manner when those



nerves gave way. But he was such an obstinate, curious young man, he might send the notes back, and then I should have to put off my journey to Jersey and go in search of him after all. Besides, there was nothing to be afraid of—he was nothing to me, and—I should like to see him just a moment before I left London, never to return!

I mustered up courage at last, called myself a little silly and other frightful names, pulled my black veil down, walked briskly along Blackman's Gardens, passed the house that had risen, phoenix-like, from the ashes of No. 10, and stopped before the establishment of Mr. George Keldon.

I remember walking very rapidly by the window, and halting in a very ungraceful manner against the house—in a sideways position, with my heart going it worse than ever. Three little dirty girls, the youngest with a swelled baby, and the eldest with a crab-shell at the end of a string, came running to have a good look at "the lady," and grouped round me, open-mouthed,

while I collected myself and tied my bonnet strings less skittishly.

All was still in the house of Mr. Keldon ; and as the thought came across me that he was ill, I did not become any more composed—on the contrary, I lost all consciousness of the door being open, and began to grope for an invisible knocker in the space where the street door ought to have been.

“This is exceedingly foolish, Barbara !” I said to myself, in the severest tone, as I took possession of the real knocker at last, and let Mr. Keldon become aware that I had arrived in Blackman's Gardens. Mr. Keldon was aware of it almost too soon, for he darted out of the room so much like a lion in wait for me round the corner, that he frightened a little scream out of me.

“Oh, dear !—I did not know you were so near !”

“I hope I haven't startled you, Miss Bloyce,” said he, with a glowing pair of cheeks ; “I thought it was your knock. Will you please to step into the parlour ?”

He led the way and I followed him into the room, where I had last stood as Mrs. Tresdaile's ambassadress. But what an extraordinary room!—I hardly knew it again. Nothing out of its place, nothing littering the floor, everything dusted and polished in first-rate style; a bunch of flowers in a little vase on the mantel-piece, and another bunch of flowers in a long-necked wine-glass on the table by the window; the uncarpeted boards as white as snow, and Mr. George Keldon in his Sunday suit—his mourning—with a black stock on and a breast-pin the head of which was almost as big as his own.

Extensive preparations had evidently been made to receive me, and George Keldon was dressed for company. The house arrangements and his own gorgeous exterior had rather nonplussed himself—he was not quite comfortable, and he kept looking anxiously round him, for fear he had omitted to put something away, the leg or the handle of which might be sticking out somewhere, and marring the general effect.

"I'm very glad to see you, Miss Bloyce," said he; "will you please to take a chair?"

When I was seated, he gave another nervous glance round him, and then sat down opposite me.

"The room doesn't look like old times, Miss," said he, rather mournfully; "and the poor old man who used to sit over there is not out of my head yet. Sometimes I fancy I can hear the flute going as it used, and I turn round expecting to see the worn, wasted figure on the sofa. Ah!" sighed Keldon, "he was a good fellow!"

"You must miss him very much, Mr. Keldon."

"Lord love you, I miss him every minute in the day," replied Keldon; "the place isn't like the same to me. It's precious miserable, Miss, to be always alone; to walk into this blessed parlour after work, and to hear no voice say 'welcome'—to turn out of my bed in the morning and have my breakfast, Robinson Crusoe fashion, before I go to the factory. Why, it isn't like home now, it's like a model cell at Pentonville."

"Surely you have some friends who—"

"No, I haven't," he interrupted, quickly ;
"I have plenty of pals at the factory, but they go their own ways of an evening ; to the Jolly Gardeners at the corner—the gardeners to Blackman's Gardens"—he added, with a laugh ; "or out for a walk with their wives or young women. But you haven't called to hear my selfish maundering, Miss Bloyce !"

"I Have called to talk about your poor grandmother," said I—"to tell you of her last wishes concerning you."

"Concerning *me* ?" said Keldon ; "did she speak of me again that night ?"

"Yes."

"A strange night, Miss Bloyce," said Keldon ; "I felt all was not right in Stamford Street, when the old lady gave way so suddenly. *They* both went that night, and the graves shut over them both the same day—and an uncommonly cheerful day that was," said he, with far from a cheerful expression of countenance ; "only two funerals in it, that's all !"

"I am afraid I'm keeping you from work, Mr. Keldon?"

"Two o'clock is my time, Miss," said he, referring to the Brobdignagian watch already alluded to in this narrative; "but three will do, or four. I hope you won't hurry—I don't see you very often."

I could not help blushing at this remark of Mr. Keldon's, although delivered in the same gloomy tone, and without any intention of embarrassing me.

"I don't think I shall detain you till two, Mr. Keldon," said I; "the business which has brought me hither can be speedily concluded."

I tried to look as business-like as possible, for I had my doubts how Mr. Keldon would receive the news.

"You must know," I began, "that it was Mrs. Tresdaile's intention to have altered her Will in your favour. Had she lived till the morning, she would have added a codicil that would have materially changed your fortunes."

"Very kind of her," said Keldon, "and

it's no less gratifying to me, though I haven't got the money, to be assured the poor old soul thought of me as her daughter's son at the eleventh hour. That eleventh hour works great wonders, Miss Bloyce, makes old enemies friends, cancels past injuries, alters many lives, and brings closer together those who have been at hammer and tongs all their days—doesn't it?"

"In most cases, yes. About half-an-hour before her death, Mr. Keldon," I continued, "your grandmother made me promise—*solemnly promise*—to make over to you the sum of two thousand two hundred and fifty pounds."

"How much?" said Keldon, leaping up in amazement.

"Two thousand two hundred and fifty pounds," I repeated, drawing forth my little packet of notes, and passing it across the table to him, "and there is the amount. Will you see it is quite right, please, and," added I, in a very business-like manner indeed, "give me a receipt in full, Mr. Keldon."

Keldon sat down again; and, without regarding the packet on the table, looked me in the face with all the concentration he could summon into his great brown eyes.

"Where does all this money come from, Miss?"

"Come from?" I stammered.

"Did Grandmother Tresdaile give it you for me before she died?—upon your honour, *did* she?"

"No."

"It comes out of the legacy she left a faithful friend?—ah! I've got you!"

"I promised *solemnly*," emphasizing my adverb for the second time, "to share my legacy with you, if she should not live till morning."

"And do you think I'd rob you by touching it?" he cried, with a vehemence that must have startled half the inhabitants in Blackman's Gardens; "damme, I'd as soon think of digging up the old lady, and robbing her of her night-cap! Take *that* money from you!" he said, giving the packet a

fillip with his finger and thumb that sent it spinning into my lap again ; " upon my soul, I'd make pins all my life, and starve over the operation sooner ! You've earned that money by your honest service, by your love, kindness, woman's gentleness, and it was never meant that I should touch a penny of it—and I won't ! "

" Mr. Keldon—" I began.

" Miss Bloyce," he interrupted, "*it's no use !* You could not talk the Monument on Fish Street Hill into taking a walk on London Bridge, and you can't talk me into pocketing money that don't belong to me. Just put it away."

" No, sir, no," I answered.

" It's kind of you—it's more than kind," said he, less violently ; " it's not what many in the world would do, and God reward you for the noble action ! "

" Mr. Keldon, I must be as firm as yourself," I replied ; " it is I should be the robber if I went back with this money."

" You are a young woman not so well able to buffet with the world and stand it's

hard knocks as I am," he said; "your legacy will smooth your way in life, keep you from hardships—get you, perhaps, a good husband some day," he added, rather lightly.

I laid the packet on the table again.

"I shall not take this back again," I said; "all Mr. Keldon's eloquence cannot make me break my promise to a dying woman, however her last, most earnest wish may be despised."

"I shan't take it," responded Keldon, sturdily. "Grandmother Tresdaile didn't know what she was saying—didn't sufficiently consider how hard it was on you. Why, Miss Bloyce," he cried at the top of his lungs again, "it would haunt me like a ghost, paralyze my energies, hang round my neck like a mill-stone and drown me in deep water. I can't take it for all the dying words of half-a-dozen grandmothers. I'd rather stand in my shirt-sleeves in the Hackney Road on a Saturday night, and sing psalms and hymns for halfpence—I'd rather go—hollo, why, what's this!"

His excitement and his obstinate determination were too much for me ; I had been flurried all day, troubled at the thoughts of coming there, more troubled since by his violence and wild gesticulations, and I fairly broke down and took refuge in sobs and tears—the best defence of our sex, take my word for it, dear reader !

George Keldon sat and scratched his curly hair, paused a moment, jumped from his chair, opened the window, shut it again, strode up and down the room, came and leaned lightly on the back of my chair, and said in a very earnest tone, but in such a gentle, subdued tone also :—

“I—I didn’t mean to make you cry, Miss Bloyce—I’m a great, blundering, blaring fool, and deserve to be kicked from one end of Blackman’s Gardens to the other ! There, there !—I’ve frightened you—don’t cry any more, there’s a good girl, for I can’t stand it, I never could ! Do leave off now, just for a little while. Shall I go out and come back when you’re better ?—will you have any brandy ?—is there anything that’s good

for you, which you particularly fancy, for I'll fetch it in a minute?"

I dried my eyes hastily, smothered my sobs as well as I could, and rose to take my leave, the bone of contention—that great bone over which so many worthy Christians snap and fight all their lives—still lying on the table.

"I have not been very well lately—have not recovered my usual strength of nerve since Mrs. Tresdaile's death," I said, rising; "I shall be better when I get into the air. I will wish you good-day now, Mr. Keldon."

Keldon looked from me to the packet of bank-notes, then back again from the notes to me, but I would not understand him.

"I say," he said at last, "you haven't put it away, you know."

"That is all settled, sir."

"Yes—settled that I'm not going to touch it," he answered, quietly; "so, if you will just—"

"I will just do nothing, sir, but leave it where it is," I cried, quite fiercely.

George Keldon jumped again.

"I didn't know you could be angry, Miss," he said; "didn't think you'd look so uncommonly nice when you were angry—but—but I'll tell you what I'll do now."

"Well, sir," compressing my lips and maintaining my fierce aspect.

"I'll take twenty pounds of it—there, there!" he cried, quickly; "I'll take forty, if you like, but don't look like that. I haven't offended you, I hope?"

"You have seriously offended me."

"Well, it's all very fine, Miss Bloyce, but what the—what is a fellow to do in a fix like this?" he asked; "it goes to my heart to think I have made you cross, and frightened you, but I can't take this money. It isn't just, nor manly! Two thousand odd, you say. Good Lord, it's all nonsense!"

I moved silently towards the door, anxious to terminate the interview, and he stood with his hands still on the back of the chair I had quitted, following me with his eyes. I did not like to leave him in anger, however—leave him for ever, too!—and I wished to impress him, if possible, with my

fixed determination never to receive back the money I had left.

"One moment's calm reflection, Mr. Keldon, will convince you of the injustice of your wishes," I said; "you will put yourself in my position and see if you could have acted differently, and borne an easy conscience. To receive back that money would be to embitter all my life."

Keldon winced at this, and scratched his head again.

"Well, I'll have some calm reflection this afternoon," said he; "but it will take a very large lump of it to convince me. Mind you, Miss Bloyce, I haven't made any promise."

"Good-bye, Mr. Keldon."

"Good-bye, good-bye. You're not offended now?"

He left his post and came towards me with one hand extended.

"No—that is—"

"That is, if I keep this and turn robber," said he; "well, *just at present* you're not offended?"

"No," I answered, shaking hands with him.

As he let go my hand, he said, very suddenly—very spasmodically :—

"I forgot to ask what's to become of you now?"

"I am going back to Jersey on Monday."

"Monday next?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean for good!"

"Yes—for good."

"And you weren't going to tell me anything about it," he said, reproachfully; "well—well—well, there was no reason why I should know it, perhaps."

He caught my hand again.

"Why, this is for ever—I'm sure not to see you any more now! You'll vanish away like a bright dream, and leave me here a lonely, miserable wretch. Miss Bloyce, you must take that money back!" he said, turning very white.

"No—no."

"Then, Miss Bloyce, I must tell you what an angel in my path you've seemed to be—

an angel very far away—something as distant from me or any hope of mine, as the sun that lights this room! Yet, yet, for all that, I could not help some madman's thoughts, I—"

"Mr. Keldon, sir, let go my hand—let me go away!"

He released my hand instantly, and said—"I'm very wrong—I'm a madman indeed, to think of happiness like that—Miss Bloyce, please think me mad, stark staring mad as any one in Bedlam!"

He opened the door for me, stood very sorrowful and downcast, with the handle in his hand.

"Good-bye—God bless you once again!"

But I was in Blackman's Gardens running for my life. And what was the good of running?—a moment more and he was at my side again, bare-headed, and more pale than ever.

"You'll say good-bye!—I shall never be happy if you don't say good-bye again, for I know I have offended you!"

"Will you take that money then?" I

murmured, hurrying on and drawing down my veil.

"Yes—yes—anything."

"Good-bye, then."

"You wouldn't like to say '*Good-bye, George,*' I suppose?" he asked, hoarser than any crow.

"Do go away, sir!—with all that money left behind on the table, how foolish and wicked you are!"

"I should like to hear you say it just for once—we shall never meet again. *Do, Miss Bloyce!*"

"There's all the people looking at you!"

"It's life and death to me, those next three words—will you?" he persisted.

I was certain he would be robbed before he got back, so I said very faintly:—


"Good-bye—*Ge—orge!*"

True to the promise he had made, he stopped on the instant and murmured something which my ears did not catch—I believe it was a blessing on my head for the third time, as I hastened out of Blackman's Gardens, far more nervous and agitated than I had entered it.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING IT UP.

It is never a pleasant sensation to go away "for good"—there is so much to be repressed, so much to suffer from, so many old ties to cut adrift on the waters. Going from school to home; from home to the world; from the new home that we have found in the world to another world across seas, or to the old home back again, are all times of trial to a sensitive heart. Certainly there are a few cold-blooded beings in existence, who migrate without emotion—birds of passage, with a few feathers over a skeleton framework, but quite heartless and



hollow—who go away for ever with a “Good-day to you,” touch your hand fishily, and are far more concerned in their boxes and umbrella, than in the disconsolate friends left behind on the door-step. Whatever might be my faults—and I have plenty of faults not introduced to the reader—a want of feeling was not one of them. Going away, if only for a fortnight, was always a hard trial, that required no small preparation.

I had all the Sunday to prepare myself, to think what I should say to Alice in the few minutes before parting; whether I should forget and forgive—whether she would forget and forgive also. And how nervous I was that Sunday, too; full of all kinds of fancies, trembling at a footfall on the stairs, or a strange voice in the passage. I went to church by myself that Sunday morning, and I entered every street on my route with a beating heart. Round every corner I expected to meet a friend of mine, even in church I should not have been surprised to see a tall individual with

a small head towering over the rest of the congregation, and fascinating the gaze of the clergyman. I will not say I was disappointed at not seeing him — I don't see why I should own everything to the reader! Still, he might have come to look good-bye from some remote post of observation. He knew I went to church regularly every Sunday morning, and if I had been a man like him, I would have had the spirit of a man, and—*never mind!*

Miserable Sunday afternoon that was—my boxes packed and corded in the hall, everything ready for departure, and a whole day to wait and think about this going away for good. No Andrew Bloyce there, Ernest Tresdaile very matter-of-fact, and Alice very thoughtful.

Alice went to her room early that evening; she did not wish me good-bye, and yet I started at five o'clock the following morning, and should be on my way to Weymouth long before she was at the breakfast-table with her brother.

“You'll have a fine day to-morrow, Miss

Bloyce," said that brother, when Alice had quitted the room.

"I hope so," I answered.

"You would not stop for the great changes, Miss Bloyce," said he—"the sale of the house property, the confusion of moving away, the—ahem!—marriage of your brother."

"I'm afraid I should not have been of much assistance, sir."

"You have never asked me, Miss Bloyce, what I think of that brother of yours, who, in Alice's opinion, is worth so many thousand pounds?"

"I can guess, sir."

"Oh, no, you can't," said he, with all his grandmother's sharpness.

"You would not have given your consent to the engagement had you entertained a prejudice against him."

He laughed silently to himself, and rubbed his hands rapidly together.

"No, no, no, of course not," said he; "he's a dear fellow, a very dear fellow!"

I glanced suspiciously at the little man—

he was not accustomed to rapturous expressions, and *was* inclined to be satirical; but the face was an unreadable one, and expressed nothing out of the common.

"He'll make a good husband, as times go," said Ernest; "every one has his faults, and I don't say your brother is an Admirable Crichton. Alice is very fond of him, so's my cousin Bartholomew—he thinks he will make a good husband too!"

"Indeed!"

"He might have done a deal of harm, that cousin Bart. of mine," said Ernest; "might have flung the lot into Chancery, and played old Harry with the money. It was lucky I told him of my consent to the engagement between Alice and your brother—eh?"

He indulged in another silent laugh before he said:—

"But I must not keep you up, Miss Bloyce, you have to rise early to-morrow. I suppose half-past four will be time enough for me?"

"For you, sir?"

"I suppose I must do the amiable as far as the Railway station; pass you through the crowd, procure your ticket, and see you don't get into a train that's off to Jericho," he replied; "you have a long journey before you, and I don't like young ladies starting off alone, as if they hadn't a friend in the world."

"I cannot think of putting you to this inconvenience, Mr. Tresdaile."

"Well, if you must know, I have promised Alice to see you off safe," said he, peevishly; "so, there's an end of it. Good-night, Miss Bloyce."


I was pleased with Alice's consideration—pleased that she had not forgotten me, and was not wholly indifferent how I got back to St. Brelade.

I went to my room meditating over this new proof of Alice's affection, and hesitating whether I should go to her room at once to say good-bye, or leave it till the morning.

I resolved to leave it till the morning; parting words might engender old feelings

and keep her wakeful all night. Yes, I would postpone the hour of trial.

Sitting in my own room, at last, thinking of the past life in the house I was about to quit, and of what changes had followed my entrance therein; what friends I had made and lost; what love, fear, hope, distrust had had their birth and death there! Thinking of the strange, disunited race my life had been spent amidst, and letting the shadows pass before me—of the stern worldly woman who had amassed so much of wealth in her long life, and who, with all her faults, harsh words, and eccentricities, had had a woman's heart; of her grandsons, Bartholomew, Barnaby, Ernest, and George—each shrewd and clear-sighted in his way, and yet each so different from the other; of the warm-hearted, loving, erring Alice! Thinking of the future, too, of the little farm on the uplands where my white-headed father and gentle mother were awaiting me, where I should pass the rest of my life so peacefully, dwindling by degrees into a sober-minded, prosy old maid.



A gentle tap without.

"Come in!"—and Alice entered.

"I have come to say good-bye, Barbara," she said, advancing slowly towards me—"I—I shouldn't like us to part with any ill-feeling, after having been *once* such friends."

"I was coming to your room early to-morrow, Alice."

She put both her hands in mine, stooped over me as I sat, and kissed me.

"We won't talk any more of the past—think any more about it, Barbara."

"Yes, Alice, we must talk a little of that past before I go away—a very little," I added, seeing that she shrank.

"Well, just a little, then," she said, "only—only don't say anything against *him*. You must remember now I am his promised wife."

She hung down her head, and blushed, and looked so beautiful.

"Have I said so much against him in my life that you should fear my men-

tioning his name?" I asked; "I may distrust his firmness, but he is very dear to me—I wish him and you, Alice, all the happiness a loving couple can enjoy."

"Oh! thank you, thank you!" she cried, with sparkling eyes; "and we *shall* be so very happy—those who marry for love always are, you know! It is the desire for wealth that blights so many homes and separates those who should be dearest to each other. And, Barbara, my dear Barbara, you are mistaken in him—he is very firm, steady, persevering. And, oh! he is so fond of me!"

"And that last excuses all his faults, Alice."

"I don't own to any faults, Barbara," said she, with her old saucy smile.

"Well, I will say no more on that subject," I said—"it is an embarrassing one for you—a delicate topic for me. Time will make him my friend and my brother again; I do not doubt that, in the future, for all his assertions to the contrary. Perhaps I misunderstand him, Alice, as much as he mis-

understands me—for we are all wise enough in our own conceit.”

“Yes, and when Andrew and I have a home of our own, you must come and spend a few weeks with us, and be the best of friends again.”

“We are hurrying from the past to the future rather hastily,” I said; “and, Alice, dear, it is the worst of weakness to build too much on that future, knowing not what a day may bring forth!”

“It is not wrong to hope.”

“No; but with sanguine natures like your own that hope is looked upon as certainty.”

“You talk as if you wished to prepare me for some disappointment,” said she, laughing; “is it well to consider despair a certainty, Barbara?”

“I was not thinking of despair, Alice. I hope you may never know what that black, mis-shapen thing is,—young, pretty, and light-hearted as you are.”

“Thank you,” said Alice, with a little mock curtsy.

"And now the past," said I, more seriously.

"Oh! no, no, not the past again—it's all forgotten and forgiven," cried Alice; "I was wrong and hasty, said some very angry, cruel words which never came from the heart, Barbara; said—well, I don't know what I said now, I am only very sorry!"

"You have a good heart, Alice, if you would only study it a little," said I; "and your kind words now are more than amends for all that has wounded me before. Still, Alice, though all is forgiven on both sides," her hands were in my own again, "let me tell you I was not in your grandmother's secrets, did not expect to hear my brother's name mentioned in the Will, did not mention that brother's name or my suspicions to your grandmother that night of the Hollingston's ball, was not prepared on that night for—"

She put her soft, white hands upon my lips, laughed, and would not listen to further explanation. She changed the sub-

ject to Jersey, and my anxiety to return thither.

"Is there any necessity to run away from me now?" she asked, eagerly.

"Is there any necessity to remain?" I replied, "now you have your brother and mine for companions? You and I have got over our little quarrels—I never thought they would last a great while—but my brother Andrew is made of sterner stuff, and will not so easily forget."

"But if you explain—"

"No, no, not to Andrew Bloyce," I cried, "it is not my place to explain to him, love him as I may. He has told me I am no longer his sister, and am undeserving of his confidence."

"He is only hasty, Barbara."

"Ah! only hasty—I hope that's all; I think that is all," I said; "and, perhaps, some day, when he has had time to think over it, he will recall his hard words, and think better of me. I am sure I should be very miserable if I thought we were to be enemies all our lives."

"And—and, Barbara?"

"Well, dear?"

"You can't think now it is my money that makes him love me—seek me for his wife?"

What could I say but "No" to the question asked so earnestly—could I even think otherwise now the engagement was made, and Alice was promised him? Could I go away and let my last words sting her?—her I might never see again? Were my dark thoughts to intercept the brightness at which she gazed—that happy dazzling future to which she looked forward with all the ardency of a young impulsive woman? So I said "No," and Alice shed tears of delight, and talked of her lover — her noble, handsome, clever lover,—for the next two hours, and thought her course of true love had not run so irregularly, considering all things—it was flowing on calmly and peacefully to the broad ocean now!

Alice and her brother went with me to the railway station, lingered till the last

moment by the side of the train which was to take me to Weymouth.

It was a comfort to part friends with Alice, to see the bright smiles again, and hear her loving words of regret at our coming separation.

“Good-bye, my dear—we shall meet again soon—I shall write next week and tell you all the news—good-bye!” cried Alice.

The train moved on, and I looked back and waved my handkerchief. It was a very misty scene to me on that platform, where mothers, fathers, friends stood and watched and prayed, wondered, too, when the hour of meeting would come again—if soon—if ever! A very misty scene, with the figures of the young girl and her prosaic brother, hardly visible to me as I started on my journey.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE GREEN LANES.

THE Mail-Packet that was to carry me from the shores of England to Jersey did not start for six hours after my arrival in Weymouth, and only they who have got half-way on their journey, are unsettled in mind and anxious to get on, can imagine what a miserable six hours those were. What a dreary time for a single woman in particular, who must keep to her private room with its ugly angular furniture, its staring looking-glass over the mantelpiece, its views of Weymouth, map of England and Wales, railway time-table and supplement to the *Times* newspaper; who must not venture into the Commercial Room, smoke a cigar,

talk politics or scandal, even fall asleep over the bottle of bad sherry for which the landlord has not forgotten to charge.

Although it was a short journey in comparison with the tedious process of going from Jersey to London by water, yet it seemed quite as long to me now, for my heart was not light, and there were no pleasant thoughts to relieve time's monotony. When I had left Jersey for London, by steam-boat throughout for economy's sake, my thoughts were saddened, now and then, by leaving home; but I had a great deal to look forward to, and that kept my spirits up. I was going into the world to make my fortune, to see brother Andrew again; going to that great bustling City of London that I had heard so much about. But now! Now I was returning home with my fortune, but with my spirits at a very low ebb. My brother Andrew had disowned me, friends had been made and *lost again*, and there was not one who cared for me—oh! I was certain there was not one left behind.

; The Royal Mail Packet started from Wey-

mouth at last, in rough weather and against adverse winds. Rough weather and adverse winds had been the rule rather than the exception lately, and although I weathered the storm very well and proved myself a good sailor, yet I cannot say as much for the rest of the passengers. Certainly we were all heartily glad to get into the harbour of St. Heliers, after beating about till five in the morning. How well I remember that grey morning; the brown cliffs of St. Heliers, the little town, the shipping in the harbour, the sailors looking over the decks at us, the sprinkling of men and boys on the pier, and the little knot of anxious friends at the landing-place. How well I remember my dear white-headed father jumping about very nervous and excited on the steps; holding out his arms to me five minutes at least before I could get into them, and what an extraordinary surprise it was—I nearly fell into the arms of the steward instead of my father at the discovery—to see by that father's side a very tall young man with a very little head!

Yes, there he was, blushing like a great girl, and grinning like a great goose. If I had not blushed myself, and found some difficulty in the management of my knees, I might have given him a freezing reception—it was so very sly not to tell me he was coming! But I was not myself that day; and how my heart kept lumping, to be sure, and oh, dear! at the very bottom of that heart, though I would not own it to myself, what a sense of happiness there was!

“God bless you, my Barbara,” said my father, kissing me; “here you are, then!—we were afraid that something had happened to the packet. I am so glad to see you—upon my word, Mr. Keldon, I don’t think I shall ever let her go again—Barbara, my dear, I believe you know this gentleman?”

“Ye—es,” I answered.

He held out his hand to me, and I put mine timidly within it.

“You did not expect to see me here, Miss Bloyce?” said he.

“No—when did you come?”

“I started on the Saturday afternoon

from London Bridge station to Newhaven," he said, with a chuckle, as he released my hand; "left No. 12, Blackman's Gardens to take care of itself; got the boat from Newhaven to Jersey, at twelve o'clock at night—reached here Sunday evening like a sick monkey with nothing inside him, found your father at St. Brelade, and—"

I was very red in the face now!

"And," added Keldon, after an embarrassing pause, "gave your father the money—I said I wouldn't keep it!"

"Mr. Keldon!" I cried, angrily.

"Why, you couldn't expect—" he began, with an irritating grin on his face again.

"I expected you to keep your word with me. If you have broken it, I never wish to speak to you again!"

"MY EYE!" muttered Keldon, turning rather pale and looking towards my father, who laughed and said:—

"I daresay, Barbara, we can make it all right; it isn't a time for explanation, now, my dear. You are fatigued already, and there are four or five miles' ride before you.

Mr. Keldon isn't so much to blame as you are."

"Why, what have I done?"

"Mr. Keldon tells me he couldn't help it," said my father, drily; "and I believe him."

I did not repeat my question, my father looked so sly about the eyes, and Keldon's face assumed such a variety of tints. We were soon in a little pony-carriage, my father and I inside, Mr. Keldon on the box. If I had not been already so bewildered, I might have been surprised at my father taking my hand between his own again, and saying, in a faltering voice:—

"My dear, warm-hearted daughter—my dear child!"

I did not answer, and he said gently:—

"Try and sleep, you must be very tired. Will you try and sleep, Barbara?"

"Yes, I will sleep till I get home and see mother—my dear mother, is she well?"

"Quite well—she was very anxious to meet you, but as the time of the boat's arrival was doubtful, I was afraid of the

excitement being too much for her, and thought she would be better at home getting breakfast ready. Mr. Keldon was kind enough to slip into the passage and put the clock back two hours before we left, but I don't think it will deceive her. He's a curious young man."

"Mr. Keldon?"

"Yes. A good young man, too—but try and sleep, my dear."

I closed my eyes, although I knew I should not sleep; my mind was too excited, my head ached and had the rock of the boat in it, even the little pony carriage appeared to pitch up and down as the steam-vessel had done in the great deep sea.

I lay back in my seat and thought half-dreamily of what had passed, of what was coming; whether George Keldon had hastened to Jersey to make the money over to me again, or whether *other reasons*—hopes had led him thither!

Home again, and everything all dreamy there, even when pressed to my mother's

breast and half-sobbing in her arms. A tasteless, dreamy breakfast, too, in the old farm-house parlour, with the windows open, the soft, warm breeze stealing in and rustling through the vine-leaves, the birds singing and the bees humming in the garden. How like a dream to have George Keldon in that room as silent and as thoughtful as myself! How like a dream altogether the year gone by, I thought when I was lying on my bed upstairs—a dream of harass, excitement, and money-hunting, and all the Tresdailes, figures born of troubled sleep!

I dozed off at last, and dreamed in earnest—had the voyage over again, with new and striking incidents: Andrew Bloyce the captain of the vessel, and shouting orders through a trumpet; Bartholomew doubled up in a knot by the boiler; Barnaby and George Keldon very sea-sick, and Ernest Tresdaile steward to the Royal Mail Packet, very busy with the basins.

It was three in the afternoon when I was downstairs again. Mr. Keldon had gone

for a walk, I was informed, and would not be back to dinner. There was no talk of Mr. Keldon during that dinner, and I was rather anxious to tell my parents about Andrew, his success with the world, and his future wife; of anything, in fact—except his quarrel with me—that would put off one great perplexing subject for a little while. Mr. Keldon returned whilst I was still talking about Andrew, and walked about the garden for fear of intruding on our private conference; looked at the grapes, made friends with the dog, who, having taken a fancy to his legs, fraternized with him immediately; inspected the bee-hives, and nearly got stung to death by trying to discover the bees whilst they were busy inside and not inclined to be interfered with.

He came at a dawdling pace into the house at last, and looked from father to me anxiously.

"Sit down, Mr. Keldon, sit down," said my father; "Barbara has not been long downstairs, and has been telling us about

her brother *ever since*—been for a long walk, Mr. Keldon?”

“Yes, to the other side of the island,” said he, taking a seat, and putting his hat—a black beaver hat, which made him look so funny!—on the table near him, quite oblivious to the fact that there was a row of pegs in the passage.

All the time George Keldon remained at St. Brelade, that hat of his was a trouble to himself and my mother. For George Keldon was not used to a hat; it made his head ache and ran him up nearly eight feet high, and was always getting knocked off with a crash, because he forgot to stoop coming in at the doors, or walking under the apple-trees in the orchard. And then the extraordinary places he left that hat in, and went out in the burning sun with nothing on his head; and the nuisance it was to my mother, who fell over it in the dark passage, and squeezed it out of shape by suddenly opening the front door, and was always removing it from the parlour or his bed-room to find it there again five minutes

afterwards, on a chair, on the floor, or stuck on the bed-post along with his over-coat, and giving one the idea of his Fetch immediately the room was entered.

George Keldon had been grave and low-spirited since I had informed him I would never speak to him again; and he did not cheer up much over that early tea, although my father's rosy face was all smiles, and he or mother, or both of them together, related the most humorous anecdotes about Jersey and the Jersey folks.

After tea my father, who was a plain-spoken man, and unaccustomed to beat about the bush, said rather bluffly to Keldon:—

“I think you had better ask Barbara to show you a little of the country before the sun goes down.”

“Oh! father,” I said, colouring, “I have not quite recovered my fatigue.”

“But Mr. Keldon wants to settle about the money, my dear; it's making him uneasy.”

“Cannot Mr. Keldon arrange that here?”

"Not so well," said Keldon, after two efforts to clear his throat; "but," with a mournful look towards me, "if you particularly wish it, Miss Bloyce, you have only to say so."

Perhaps I did not particularly wish it, for I offered no further opposition, and ten minutes afterwards there we were both in one of those shady green lanes which Jersey alone has in perfection. I don't know any place in or out of England that has so many green lanes, winding through hill, dale, valley and farm-land, as the little island where I was born. They stretch in picturesque confusion on every side, and each turn of the road shows a fair landscape. Down one of these lanes, with the trees arching overhead, a grand nave of Nature's cathedral, beyond which in the far distance was the sky red with the sunset, went George Keldon and I. Slowly, silently together, my hand trembling on his arm.

"Well, about this money?" he said, at last.

Was it about his grandmother's money, only about that, then! How relieved I ought to have felt!

"If you had told me it was your fixed intention to restore it, I might have saved you this long journey, sir," I answered; "but—"

"Well—but?" he repeated.

"But you promised me to keep it."

"I was excited at the moment, Miss Bloyce," he replied; "am I bound by what I said so hastily?"

"I think so."

"Then, you're in for it, by Jingo!" he exclaimed, exultingly; "for I said then I—hold hard, George, and let's go to work genteelly! Now, Miss Bloyce," he said, suddenly calming down, "this money subject, am I to take it or leave it alone?"

"Take it."

"If I leave it alone, I go away to-night, never—I *mean* never this time!—to come back, or see your face again; but if I take it, I must take with it one who can make my life full of a happiness I daren't dream

of yet. I won't say," he added, in broken accents, "how I love you,—God knows I can't explain that!—but I will say, if you cannot take me for your honest, faithful husband, you crush out of me all hope and energy. Your life must be bound up with mine, or mine, dear girl, is valueless!"

I hung down my head and trembled very much; but, oh! I was so happy.

"I feel now, Miss Bloyce, that I could make that life a great one if you shared it—that there is nothing I could not succeed with, and that there is no trouble, with your bright face to shine upon it, that would not turn to gladness!"

He took my hand in his, and held it fast, as he continued:—

"I am not a learned man, I'm not a fine gentleman; but I don't think you would care for either, or let that bar my way. Dear Miss Bloyce," he murmured, "is it yes?—I think, thank God, it must be yes, although I don't deserve it!"

He leaned forward and looked into my brimming eyes for his answer; he read

his answer there too, but it did not content him.

"Is it yes?" he repeated; "can you trust me with your happiness?"

"With my life, Keldon!"

Under the rustling leaves that bright evening in the autumn began the beginning of that happiness I was to trust him with—the beginning of a life never once to be regretted or repented of. Under the boughs of the great green trees we walked together slowly; talking of the past, of the first time when the thought crossed him, crossed me, how bravely one might fight the battle with one to love like that!

Oh! Keldon, faithful lover, honoured husband, best of comforters, standing by my side now and looking on me as I write this chronicle, how bravely you have fought the battle, and how happy in all the trials which followed the joining of our hands has been our wedded life!

He stoops, looks at my manuscript, and gives his honest hearty laugh.

"Why, Barbara, what nonsense are you

up to now? If ever our story gets into print, my lass, the world will think you've been painting me up rather fine, and I'm hanged if you haven't too! Here, lend a hand to this cradle—the little beggar's waking up!"

END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

BOOK IV.

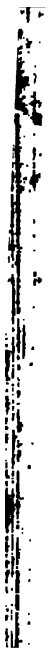
"Husband! Wife!

There is some holy mystery in those names
That sure the unmarried cannot understand."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

"Everye white will have its blacke,
And everye sweete its sowre;
This founde the ladye Christabelle
In an untimely howre."

PERCY RELIQUES.



CHAPTER I.

MRS. KELDON.

IF the curtain rise one year after that lover's ramble in the Jersey lanes, dear reader, what high-flown scenes and well-grouped pictures can I show you? Will you, used to moving incidents, red fire and spangles, be content with my quiet English home, the happy *trio* at the fireside, the Darby and Joan dialogues of housekeeping, the future and the baby?

Not that the rest of this book will be all about the housekeeping and the baby, though the housekeeping was in my thoughts a great deal, and the baby never out of them.

And, fair reader, you of my own sex, a

young mother, with a kind, faithful husband at your side, perhaps *you* will forgive me if I talk a little too much of that first baby of mine—haven't you talked a little too much about your's now and then, and bored all your admiring friends and relations?

It was such a dear baby—mine, of course!—it had such very large eyes, such winning manners, such an engaging way of sucking its little fist! It was a fine baby, too, and it was the image of its father, though it had *not* a little head. George said, satirically, it was a big-headed baby, and as for its caps, he could wear every one of them—but that was only his fun, though he vexed me very much one day by trying to get his head in, and crumpling the borders with his great clumsy fingers.

And oh! how happy we were!—he and I—in our little home, loving and trusting one another as we had promised to do till death did us part! He was then, as he is now, God be thanked, all thought and kindness; making too much of me, I fear, in other people's eyes, but still the best and

noblest of husbands. The cleverest of husbands, too, though I, Barbara Keldon, say so—ay, and am proud to say so! I knew he was not quite a simpleton when I married him—he showed excellent taste, too, at that time, my father thought, and—I thought so, too!) I had been prepared for a shrewd, clear-sighted man, quick to make or suggest an improvement, but I hardly expected to find in him a something which was almost like Genius. He was a deep thinker, he had studied mechanics all his life, his brain had never lain fallow for want of thought and invention, and was quick—even a little too quick—to grasp an idea.

That over-readiness to conceive something new stood first in his way, and a lack of concentration formed barrier No. 2, which would have blocked up his path all his life, had he not married a sensible woman—*ahem!*

In the beginning of our wedded life I had to take him in hand and keep his imagination down, or he would have been trying fifty experiments at once and mud-

dling the whole of them, and great difficulty I had, at times, to restrain him from setting everything aside, and losing his time and his money over a bran new idea.

But I had a plan to keep him to his work, and I am going to divulge that plan, free, gratis, and for nothing, for the benefit of those lady-readers of mine who wear the gold-ring on the fourth finger of the left hand. Ladies, who like your husbands at home, who prefer them steady, and persevering, and energetic—attention! TAKE AN INTEREST IN YOUR HUSBAND'S PURSUITS. If he's a tradesman, be interested in his profits and losses; don't be indifferent to his last speculation, his bargains at market, or his opposition over the way. If he's an author—"poor devil," says Keldon, compassionately), or an artist, or any of those workers at up-hill professions, which *may* turn out profitable when he goes on crutches, or wants a perambulator, talk to him of his MS., or his canvas, of his heroes and heroines, his lay figures and groupings, and keep the pen and the brush in good action.

Let those in the home have no care for the work by which that home's made, and the shadow will fall, fair lady, more often than the pride of the worker will own. It is hard enough to find the world look on slightly, but to find in those nearest and dearest no sympathy with the labour which keeps mind and hand busy, is the hardest of trials.

Perhaps some fine lady flings up her white jewelled hands despairingly, and cries,

"Ah! but my husband knows not what trade is; can just tell a book from a picture when he sees them together, has nothing to work for, and some trouble to kill time—how shall I keep *him* at my side as in the old courting days?"

Why, there are some amusements and hobbies in which a wife can be interested—if you listened patiently to his stories of the hunt or the last match at cricket, he might learn the lesson of attention when you worry him to death about pin-money, and the servants!

Now, George Keldon had more time on his hands, he was studying deeply some new principle of labour, interrupted a little by ideas for a pump, a clock, and a diving-bell, explanatory diagrams of which he had contented himself with making for the present. He had a little workshop or study, in the rear of our house in the Kingsland Road, and in that study he worked at his plans, and I sat near him, when baby would let me, and read to him from his favourite books. My husband had discovered, or thought he had discovered, a method of converting wheat into flour by a decorticating process, and it was to this scheme that his chief attention was directed. The idea had originated from inspecting the mill of a neighbour in a curious moment, and asking more questions concerning the machinery than any one on the premises could reply to. He went to see the working operations of the mill once or twice after that, and returned very gritty and thoughtful; he procured one or two books, sat up at nights to read them, made several tools,

bought a few more, and went at his plans in earnest.

And his work progressed, for there was a light hand and a clever head over it, and I kept his thoughts from going astray by talking of the fortune we might make by the discovery.

The interest of our money, in the Three-per-cent Consols, did not bring in a large sum, but it kept house and home together, and we were both careful house-keepers. A hundred and twenty pounds per annum was a great deal to us in the early stage of our career, and we could live on that sum and be happy, till George made himself famous. I had great faith in my husband's future, and I had the courage to wait patiently for it. He had faith in himself, though he was no castle-builder—if it had been all speculation, and he could not have marked his own progress, he would not have wasted an hour.

And our visitors? Were there no friends of the past to visit us, in the Kingsland Road, and wish us health, happiness and

prosperity?—no one to see the baby and be struck by its perfection? Yes, there were friends, and the first of them to call upon us was Mr. Barnaby Tresdaile, a perfect gentleman now, who kept a pony-chaise and a little boy in buttons to drive him about town, and run over people. It had been no small satisfaction to me to find Mr. Barnaby Tresdaile remembered in his grandmother's Will, and I was glad to see him enjoying his great change of position, and taking so naturally to it. His heart had not narrowed with the increase to his fortune; he was the same easy-tempered, affable gentleman as of yore. He had not learned the lesson of content, though—a legacy of fifteen thousand pounds and a third share of the value of the tobacco business had not kept him from speculative enterprises. He was more full of scheming than ever, and had only exchanged writing prospectuses, and promoting public companies, to a place at board meetings, and a seat in state as Director.

“We are going to make a Tobacco

Company of the old place, Keldon," said he; "grandmother's warehouse becomes the premises of a company second only to the Bank of England."

"Wish it every success," said Keldon, quietly smoking his pipe in the corner.

"I shall put you down for ten shares, old fellow."

"Oh! no, you won't," was my husband's reply, shaking his head and laughing.

"My dear Keldon, did I ever recommend anything that would have robbed you of a halfpenny?"

"No," said Keldon; "and if you had, I had not a halfpenny to spare, so it would not have mattered much. Why didn't you leave the well alone, and let Barty buy you and Ernest out?"

"Bart. had not the money to spare, and as he's a sharp fellow, I thought I might work him as general manager."

"Oh! that's it."

"And Bart. and I are the best of friends, now—he entertains the highest opinion of my plan, and has gone in for it deeply.

He and I together have bought out cousin Ernest."

"Did not Mr. Ernest Tresdaile see all the advantages offered by the new company, then?" I ventured to inquire.

"Well—no, he didn't, Mrs. Keldon—or," corrected Barnaby, "he would not. He's an over-cautious young man, and, to tell you the truth, I can't exactly make him out."

Barnaby Tresdaile was not the only person puzzled with Mr. Ernest Tresdaile; when that latter gentleman came with his sister to wish me joy, he began to puzzle me with his praises of my brother Andrew, talking so much of the engagement and so little of the marriage.

"Is the day fixed?" I asked, when Alice was too busy with the boy to notice me.

"N—no, not yet," he replied, in a hesitating manner; "I tell the young turtles there is plenty of time for matrimony, and it is a pity to drag the flowers of courtship up too soon. Do you admire long engagements, Mrs. Keldon?"

"There is much to be said for and against them," I replied, evasively.

"I like young couples to understand each other before they dash to the altar," said Ernest; "and I really am not in such a hurry to see Alice a bride as dear Barty of ours."

It may be as well to state in this discursive chapter, that Ernest Tresdaile took from that night what is called "a fancy" to my husband. There was something in Keldon's bluntness and decision which pleased his cousin, and when Keldon took him into his confidence, told him his plans, and exhibited his models, Ernest Tresdaile cried:—

"Upon my word, Mr. Keldon, you are treating me like an old friend. Are you not afraid of my running away with some of your ideas?"

"I can trust you."

"Why?" was the sharp rejoinder.

"Because I have got the start, and can run faster than you."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Ernest, "so you

ought with those legs, friend. But seriously, does our cousin Barnaby know of this invention?"

"Yes."

"Ah! well, he's not such a bad sort—and Bart.?"

"I haven't seen Bart. since the poor old lady's funeral."

"Don't you miss him?"

"Well," said Keldon, looking doubtfully at Ernest, "I can't say I have missed him much yet."

"You're not such a dear friend as I am—I forgot that," answered Ernest; "he is the best of company, and he's always coming to see *me*! If he had not been of an amiable nature, we might have had some difficulty in proving that Will."

"Or if there had not been such a chance of Miss Tresdaile becoming Mrs. Bloyce?"

"Have you seen Mr. Bloyce?" asked Ernest, quickly.

"No, he has not troubled us yet."

The gentlemen lowered their voices, and

Alice, who was then by my side, looked into my face and laughed.

"They are talking of Andrew—I want to talk of Andrew, too, dear Barbara."

"There is no one I am more willing to talk about," I answered, "although—"

"Although?" repeated Alice.

"He has forgotten me," I added.

"No, no, my dear, you are mistaken," said Alice, with energy; "you must not think that of one always considerate and kind. He has been very busy lately with his music, been travelling about the country, or he would have called to see you earlier. He bears no malice, and is anxious to forget and forgive."

"Really anxious!" I cried; "oh! Alice, it is only the old faith and hope in him that is wanted to complete my happiness. When will he come?—my dear old brother Andrew!"

I had forgotten our last interview, the bitter, angry words, and the suspicions that those words engendered. I was happy myself, and inclined to believe in the hap-

piness of others ; the engagement had lasted so long, and Alice was still so confident, that I could but think I had judged Andrew too hastily.

He was coming to see me, and a new life was to begin for us all ! We talked of Andrew the remainder of the evening — it was a subject of which Alice never tired. He was the *beau ideal* of a lover, always tender and affectionate, putting up with all her caprices (and she *was* capricious at times), studying her lightest wish in everything. Oh ! how her grandmother had been mistaken in him, and how everybody had misjudged his character but *one* !

“And the day when this engagement ends, dear Alice, and a new life commences ?” I asked, after she had run on thus rapturously for half-an-hour.

“Early in the spring, I think,” she said, blushing ; “but we have not mentioned our intention to Ernest, he seems so reluctant to part with me. Ernest is a dear kind brother, too, although I have to scold him very much at times.”

"Indeed!"

"He is so full of his lectures, and teachings, and warnings," said Alice, with some of her old pettishness; "talks so much of the uncertainty of everything in this world, and how we ought to be prepared for any change."

"Does he like Andrew?"

"He is very friendly with him, but—— oh! yes, he must like him," cried Alice—"everybody must like my handsome Andrew."

Handsome Andrew came a few days afterwards, to offer me the kiss of peace and to sink the bygones in oblivion for ever.

He took me in his arms, saying:—

"We are not to talk any more of the past, Barbara—of who was wrong and who was right; who judged too quickly, and who resented, perhaps too hastily that judgment—the present and the future will be sufficient for us both."

He turned to my husband and held out his hand.

"You have possibly heard something of our

disputes, Mr. Keldon," said he, laughing; "how Barbara objected to engagements on the sly in all cases—except her own! *We* shall have no need to talk of the past, either."

Whilst they stood together for the first time, and my brother, rather late in the day, offered his congratulations, I regarded him attentively. It was a full year since that last bitter parting in the hall of Mrs. Tresdaile's house, and I could see a change in him. The face was paler and more thin, and there were lines about the face—faint sketchy lines though they were—which told of Care's pencilling. There were shadows, too, under the full bright eyes, and the whole expression of the face was something new, and made my heart sink. A stranger coming into the room and looking at him for the first time would have thought he was an anxious man, one who was fighting his way in the world, and finding that way full of hardships.

And yet his manner at first would have contravened my assertion—he talked lightly

enough of that world and its cares; had a pleasant ringing laugh for everything, was in his ways so unlike the Andrew Bloyce of a year ago, and put me so much in mind of the warm-hearted brother of years still further distant.

When my husband left us alone together for a little while, I did not seek his confidence and he did not give it me unasked. I had not courage enough to inquire about that splendid fortune he was so certain of at Hastings, and he never once alluded to it. Much of his sanguine nature seemed suddenly to have dropped from him like a cloak. I asked about his opera, however, and he laughed.

"Oh! it is getting on—slowly perhaps—but still in the right direction."

"Have you any pupils now?"

"Yes—a few."

"When you marry you must be more industrious, Andrew."

I fancied there was the slightest contraction of the brow as if my observation pained him, but he answered quickly:—

"Marriage brings the industry out of a man, and keeps his wits at work, does it not? Who is it says, 'It is as good a test of a man's philosophy as poverty is of his virtue'?"

"A shrewd thinker."

"I should think Poverty the hardest test of the two," said Andrew; "for Virtue shrinks a little, Barbara, when privation steps in and a dazzling bait tempts it. Do you ever wonder, Barbara, how we shall all be tried for our past sins and offences—whether the nature of the temptation, and the frequency with which it attacked us, will not be considered? Some men," said he, "have no trouble to be good, and some men must be no common heroes to keep back from the evil."

He caught my earnest gaze, and changed his manner again—the light laugh came back, and with it all his easy nonchalance.

"You see a man becomes thoughtful as he marches to the great estate of Matrimony, sister; puts on his considering cap, even pulls the peak over his eyes, and blinds

himself to consequences. I daresay I shall make a poor philosopher enough, and plague my wife after the fashion of a true husband—poor Alice!

If there were more depth in the last two words, the effect was lost by that which succeeded.

“Housekeeping, taxes and squalling children will drive Philosophy out of window, and there will be left but the love of a wild little madcap to comfort me.”

“*But* the love, Andrew!”

How strange he was that night of our reunion! The forehead was lined again, and there was a wild light in his eyes!

“Barbara,” he cried, almost scornfully, “love is a vapour at the best. When Alice finds—”

Another pause—a sentence never finished—for Keldon re-entered at this moment, and the maid brought in my baby.

“Ah! my little nephew,” he cried, “come and welcome the first appearance of your respectable uncle.”

He held out his arms, but baby objected

in strong terms to the transference, and even the attraction of pulling his long brown moustache could not induce it to acknowledge the relationship. It was late when Andrew left, when I sat rather thoughtfully by the fire, with my baby on my lap, and Keldon with his after-supper pipe, puffed away opposite and watched me.

"Now, Barbara, lass, what is disturbing you?" he asked at last, cheerfully; "you and your brother haven't been skirmishing together to-night, and yet something don't please you."

"I wish I could understand him a little better!"

"Your brother?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps he don't want to be married," George suggested; "or the young one has frightened him?—it was an awful warning, Barbara, to mind what he was about!"

"Don't be impertinent, sir."

"Well, I wont," said he; "but I can't help your not making your brother out exactly. He seems to me a good sort of a

young fellow enough—been a little gay in his time, perhaps, and sown heaps of wild oats.”

“I hope not.”

“I should say he was a clever young fellow, too—he hasn’t got what I call a tom-fool look about him.”

“Did it strike you he was thoughtful, George?”

“Now you speak of it, I fancied he turned thoughtful once or twice. Perhaps he *has* a little something on his mind, or wears tight boots, my dear.”

If it were something on his mind, and he were struggling with it! He who was so weak in the battle of life would surely give way and let it conquer him. Why was it so hard to decipher Andrew’s character—to be eternally deceived in it? Was it that for the time his wishes, aspirations, castle-building, deceived even himself!

So the curtain rises again, and the old characters come once more upon the scene to play the story out. Will not the story change before the play is done, and are

there not signs already on the surface, of future toil and trouble? In the light-hearted girl, full of her young impassioned love; in her handsome lover and his newborn thoughtfulness, varied as it is by flashes of a lighter nature—perhaps of a nature more akin to recklessness; in her calculating, ever watchful brother—are there no signs to read and judge from? Will peace rest with them in their strange engagement, involving in its course so large a sum of money?—will the lovers live “happy ever afterwards,” and Bartholomew become rich and—happy too?

CHAPTER II.

NEXT DOOR.

THERE was a piece of garden ground at the back of our house in the Kingsland Road, and there of an evening, whilst autumn remained to us, would George Keldon and I — and the baby of course — occasionally spend an hour before nightfall.

It was not a large garden ; my husband in three strides—but then he had very long legs,—could step from the end wall into the wash-house ; it was not extensively stocked, although the few flowers we had placed therein flourished pretty well, considering the difficulties with which they had to con-

tend. Difficulties not only natural in the shape of limited space and London air — we lived scarcely a mile from Shoreditch Church — but artificial, occasioned by George's inquiring disposition; for when he was not experimentalizing on colour, and trying to turn the roses and dahlias blue, he was pulling them to pieces to see the construction.

"Many a lesson in mechanics, my dear," he would say to my objections, "is to be learned from these little chaps. What a capital idea for a milk-jug, now, this Dragon's-jaw suggests. If our Betty had had a self-acting mug, which shut up after its 'haporth,' she wouldn't have spilt every drop of milk this morning staring after the policeman! What a trap, too, for those black beetles which worry you so, Barbara, and keep your legs always on your mind — hanged if I don't make a beetle-trap in gutta percha!"

"Do leave the flowers alone, dear."

"I never look at a dahlia," he continued, dragging the last King of Whites roughly

towards him; "without thinking of those prison chapels, where everybody looks straight at the parson, and not at each other. The parson hums away at his flock of black sheep in the middle here, and every man Jack of them is boxed up before him, in a little pew like this. I couldn't help thinking when you took me to church last Sunday—"

"I took you!—oh, George! didn't you want to go?"

"To be sure I did," he answered; "but I said 'you took me,' because I was more in the habit of going to Hampton Court than prayer-meetings when I was a single young man—and I couldn't help thinking—"

"Of the service, I hope?"

"Of how little other people thought of the service, and how much more attentive we should all be if churches were in the prison style; if we had pews to ourselves and there were no bonnets to look at,—no nice young men for the ladies, no nice young women for the gentlemen, nothing but his

reverence straight a-head, pinning us down with his doctrines, like so many cock-chasers."

"George, George!"

"Well, it is a queer simile, although I have heard of one or two Christians with cock-chaser principles."

"You should not talk in that wild fashion, George," I said, reproachfully.

"Lord love you, it's only a habit of mine," he cried quickly; "I hope I haven't hurt your feelings, Barbara? I didn't admire persons overmuch, till one of them made me happy, and put your hand in mine for life, blessing the couple of us too like a trump—then I took kindly to the lot of them, and," he said, suddenly laying his hand on mine—"am all the better for them."

"Really?"

"Really—on my honour."

We were both silent after that, sitting on the rustic garden-seat which George had made. It was a happy moment to hear him confess as much to me, to find my efforts

had not been thrown away. We had our little pew at church, and George went with me every Sunday; but his home, or the model unfinished in the back-room upstairs, kept his thoughts pre-occupied, despite my frequent touches on his arm, till there came a new rector, who, *mirabile dictu*, was not only a clever man but an earnest one; and George Keldon, though he never talked of religion even to me, thought more of it, and became, if possible, a better husband still.

It was not winter when the house next door to us was let, and the new tenants were walking round their little garden. They were not neighbourly people, for they never entered the garden if George or I were in our's, and if we came out accidentally and took them by surprise, it was the signal for a hasty disappearance.

We were not anxious for new friends, did not even wish for a "good morning," and "a fine day," over the low garden-wall which divided us, but there was such a studied effort to avoid us, that it nettled my woman's feelings.

"They're very good neighbours," George would affirm; "they don't make a row with a piano, or quarrel and wake up the whole street. I've known No. 11 of Blackman's Gardens pitch his wife clean out of window, and swear he'd come out after her and jump on her!"

"But why do they go in-doors when we enter the garden?" I said, indignantly; "and why did the lady draw her crape veil over her face, and turn her back upon me when I met her at the street door yesterday?—are we such very unpleasant neighbours?"

"Don't she serve her neighbours on the other side in the same fashion—didn't that little man with the buckskins and blue-bag say 'a fine morning, ma'am,' and didn't she walk out of the front gate as if she were stone deaf? It's my belief, Barbara, that she has seen a great deal of trouble—she is in mourning, remember."

"But—"

"But you are a very curious woman, Barbara—you're a true specimen of the sex," he said; "don't you wish to know

who they both are, whom they've lost, what's their profession, whether they're husband and wife, brother and sister, or father and daughter—let's ask the maid-of-all-work into tea."

But I found them out without giving the invitation proposed by my satirical husband. Hadn't I a right to find them out? What lady is not curious about her neighbours? Haven't you, my good friend, peeped behind the blind at the party next door, and can you rest satisfied when new neighbours turn up till you know all about them, whether they are wholesale, retail, or for exportation? It is not in the nature of things to rest indifferent on such stirring occasions.

However, I did not watch my neighbours, or inquire of the milkman; my discovery was made honestly and quite by chance. I had been out shopping for baby—for baby was to be short-coated on Sunday, and required satin-bows for the shoulders, and tiny socks, and a hundred other things besides—and I met these neighbours a hundred yards from their own house. The lady's veil

was up and I resolved to have a good look at her, and even to make sure whether the gentleman on whose arm she leaned, *was* father, husband, or brother.

They were not thinking of me, and I was close upon them before something in my dress seemed to suggest who I was. The lady started and raised her hand to her veil, but it was too late.

"Miss Hollingston," I exclaimed, almost involuntarily, and then glancing at her companion, "Colonel Hollingston!"

"Miss Bloyce, I believe?" replied Miss Hollingston, with a very distant bow.

"Miss who?"—whispered her father; "God bless me, not Miss Thingamy—Emily?"

Father and daughter had both strangely altered—the father looked very old, the pompous look was gone, the great white moustaches had been shaven off, and there was such an air of mental feebleness upon the poor lined face! Miss Hollingston was pale, but still the beautiful, dark-eyed girl I had met first at Hastings—

there was the same haughty carriage minus the patronage, the same cold reserve minus the supercilious glance which had made that reserve so intolerable. They had fallen, and I felt for them. What train of events had brought to pass their ruin—and it was nearly ruin I could see—they seemed to bear them well and, better still, together. Father and daughter still side by side made a pleasant picture, and my heart warmed a little to Miss Hollingston that day. Perhaps Adversity is the best test of our true natures.

“I hope you are well, Colonel.”

He raised his hat in the old formal style, and said :—

“Quite well, thank you, Miss—Miss?”

He looked helplessly towards his daughter.

“Bloyce—you remember, papa?”

“Perfectly, my dear, perfectly,” was the answer; “old lady in a Bath chair always with her—a very unpleasant old lady, wasn’t she?”

The Colonel shuddered, and cast a ner-

vous glance over his shoulder, as though he were fearful of finding Mrs. Tresdaile at his heels.

"Time has changed him, Miss Bloyce—changed us," she added.

"Time changes all of us," I replied; "and brings round many strange events."

"It has brought us far-east and made us neighbours," replied Miss Hollingston, loftily; "a strange event, indeed."

"I regret—"

"There's nothing to regret, Miss Bloyce," was the quick assertion; "we are in our proper sphere—the position of old time was more false and unreal than I believed."

"May I ask, if you were aware of our proximity?"

"Last week for the first time," she replied; "but we were not such friends in the past that there was any need to renew our acquaintance."

"No," said I, colouring; "perhaps not, but you were strangers, and new to life such as ours. We might have been of assistance—"

"We have learned to assist ourselves," was the cold answer; "we seek no aid, no friends—we are so much better alone. Our friends of the past care not for us; we have shunned them and brought to a lower sphere our pride to resist them, and—" looking at her father—"our courage to fight our own battle."

"Ah, it's hard!" sighed the old man; "I don't exactly understand it—I—"

"We are detaining Miss Bloyce—or rather Mrs. —?"

"Keldon," I answered.

"You are the first to marry, then," she said; "I used to think once you would marry well."

"I have married well, Miss Hollingston."

"You might have made a better match, I think," with her old manner, that worldly manner which had made me once dislike her, "with your accomplishments. Good-day."

"Good-day."

I was nearly home when a light hand

touched my arm, and Miss Hollingston was at my side again; the Colonel a few yards distant was standing at the edge of the pavement, and rather inclined to be terrified at his unprotected situation.

"Miss Bloyce—Mrs. Keldon," she said, in a firm tone, "I have to ask you to keep my existence in the Kingsland Road a secret? I am not ashamed of it; I may deserve it, but I do not want to be mocked by any friends' condolence."

"Do you think Miss Tresdaile—"

"Miss Tresdaile belongs to a world I have resigned. It would be a bitter hour to see or hear from *her* again."

"She would offer you no mockery of sympathy."

"She will never have the power!"

She turned hastily away, then paused again—

"I may trust you and your husband?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

She inclined her head slightly, and then

rejoined her father, leaving me to return home and ponder over the vicissitudes of fortune.

"It must be an awful drop," remarked George, when I had communicated my discovery; "head over heels from independence and a carriage and pair, to shabby gentility in the Kingsland Road—better to have been never rich, Barbara."

"I think so."

The discovery of Colonel Hollingston and daughter in my neighbours did not lead to much, and I made no effort to renew the intimacy. Miss Hollingston shunned us as frequently as before, drew her father away in a different direction whenever we came in sight, and, although once or twice chance brought us face to face, it was only with the haughtiest bow that she acknowledged my salutation.

Yet I could but admire her—see in her many noble qualities, which would have been never developed in her first estate. Her care for her father, the stout heart which she put upon his and her reverses,

even the bold, defiant hand with which she thrust away all offers of kindness, were traits worth of admiration — especially in her who had been a fine lady from her cradle, and never dreamed of hope and home and fortune becoming one great wreck together.

So complete a wreck had it been, that the frail spars left upon the seas were not sufficient in themselves to keep father and daughter from sinking. Miss Hollingston in her leisure time worked hard, and George and I never returned late at night from Mr. Tresdaile's, whither we went occasionally, without seeing the light in the parlour, and her figure on the blind, bending over a desk or drawing earnestly.

Returning home one night in the beginning of the winter, we were told by our maid that Miss Hollingston had called and inquired for Mrs. Keldon, that she had appeared disturbed to hear I was absent from home, and trusted I would oblige her by looking in for one minute on my return.

I hastened to comply, and found Miss

Hollingson awaiting my arrival by the fireside — sitting before it, and looking thoughtfully into its depths.

"I hope no bad news has induced you to send for me, Miss Hollingson?"

"Bad news only to me," said she, with a sickly smile; "my father has been very ill—I fear he is breaking up slowly, Mrs. Keldon."

"Oh! not so bad as that, I trust."

"Time must prove that, Mrs. Keldon—the doctor gives me hope—but," with a quivering lip, "such hope!"

"Was the Colonel taken ill this evening?"

"Yes, with one of his wild fits; when there is no controlling him, when he moans and raves over the fortune he has lost, as if extravagance of grief could bring back what extravagance of conduct—in father and daughter both—has dissipated. In such fits he is beyond my control, and the doctor assures me it is dangerous to be alone with him. But I am not afraid."

"Where is he now?"

"Sleeping off the effects of an opiate upon the couch in the next room," replied Miss Hollingston; "he may be calmer when he wakes—he may not be."

"Can my husband be of any assistance, Miss Hollingston?"

"You are very kind—I shall never be able to repay you," she murmured, seizing my hand and pressing it; "if Mr. Keldon will join you for an hour, it will be a real service I shall not forget."

Mr. Keldon came at my request, took his place in the front parlour, and was introduced to Miss Hollingston. We spent the next hour in very dreary common-place talk, I running next door once or twice to see after the baby, George endeavouring to bring his conversational powers into play, and looking very sleepy.

"The doctor recommends a little society for the Colonel," observed Miss Hollingston; "a strange prescription for us. Had he seen a little less society, we—" she stopped and compressed her lips—

"It is not womanly to complain, is it, Mr. Keldon?" she added.

"You won't feel any the better for it," said George, waking up suddenly. Despite his frequent nods, he was perfectly able to join in conversation, and not to be caught under any pretext.

Miss Hollingston smiled.

"Neither a better woman nor nurse," said Miss Hollingston; "you are right, Mr. Keldon—but I am playing a selfish part to-night in depriving you both of your natural rest."

"It's not right to leave you alone," said Keldon, "especially as the old gentleman is inclined to wake up rusty. It's no trouble to me, but—"

He looked towards me, and I tried to frown him into silence, but without effect.

"—But my good lady there don't get much rest at any time, owing to the youngster's excellent lungs, and one or two wakeful nights prey upon her and make her pale."

"I am not so soon vanquished," I answered.

Miss Hollingston was about to second my husband's request, when a moan in the next

room caused her to start up and hurry from us.

"You great stupid fellow!" I said, "don't you know you could not be left to keep watch with Miss Hollingston alone."

"Why not?"

"What would the neighbours say?"

"They had better say nothing in my hearing, by George!" said Keldon, doubling his fist.

"People will talk."

"Ah! true enough, Barbara—you're right, my girl, as usual," he said, thoughtfully; "and a poor girl with a mad father is not spared, if there's a chance of flinging scandal at her. It was so in Blackman's Gardens, and the quality don't improve the higher we go up in the scale. I say," in a lower tone, "the old chap's better, and I shan't have to knock him down and sit upon him till some one fetches the doctor. I can hear him talking."

Sure enough, Colonel Hollingston was better; he came into the parlour, leaning on the arm of his daughter, looking rather scared, but not particularly ill.

"You see I have company to-night, papa."

"Yes, yes—company, as you say."

"Mr. and Mrs. Keldon have been kind enough to call and inquire after your health."

"Very kind indeed."

He bowed to each of us, sat down before George Keldon, looked hard at him, then at me, then back to my husband again.

"God bless me, how you have grown!" he ejaculated at last.

"Well—yes, I have lately," said Keldon, who thought the best thing he could do was to humour the old gentleman.

"Your sister seems about the same, now?"

"Just the same as ever," with an expressive wink at me.

"Got rid of all your moustaches, Joyce? —I should have hardly known you."

"It is astonishing the difference it makes."

"What sort of a book have you made lately, now?"

"Oh! as good a book as ever."

"The devil's own luck as well as your own."

"Exactly—exactly!"

"And I all wrong—taking your advice, too—sinking further into debt, disgracing my name and connections, and going head-long to ruin—dragging my only daughter down with me, like a sinful old blackguard as I am. If I had only died a year ago, before the crash came, or hedged in time and saved at least a little something—for *her*!" pointing to his daughter.

Miss Hollingston stood by her father's side, her brow contracted, one white hand clenched, her bosom slowly heaving. She would have given worlds then to have been spared such witnesses to her father's weakness.

"You see, Mrs. Keldon, he knows not what he says."

"Even my own brother died and did not leave me a penny; he was a lord, Miss," addressing me with tears in his eyes, "and I ought to have had his title—but he betrayed me, had been married ten years to a foreigner, who had brought him three children—all boys, sir, by—"

"Father!"

"Betrayed on all sides—why Doyce, Joyce," catching fast hold of Keldon's arm, "even you betrayed me in that last move—don't you recollect?"

"Yes, yes, hardly betrayed you though."

"You did," he whispered, "you—"

"Father, this is Mr. Keldon, our neighbour, not Mr.—not the gentleman you think."

"Mr. Bellman!—I don't know any bellmen, Emily."

"You must look in and see my models," said Keldon; "they'll amuse you, old gentleman."

"Thank you, my dear sir, but I don't require amusing."

"Thank you," murmured Miss Hollingston more gratefully, then added, in a lower tone, "there is no cause for alarm now—his excitement may not return for weeks. Pray, do not let me keep you longer from your rest."

After that night Miss Hollingston became more friendly towards us; and when George

Keldon kept his word and took the poor old Colonel into his "study," and let him sit there and watch him at his work, the reserve still more perceptibly decreased, although there were fits of coldness that would assert themselves at times. But we became very good friends—she would bring her crayon drawings into my house now and then, and keep me company; while George good temperedly bore with the old gentleman, answered all his questions, and told him simple little stories that one would have related to a child.

Miss Hollingston spoke a great deal of my husband at these times, and won my heart that way—spoke more in his praise, of his perseverance, forbearance and manliness than I dare to write here, but not more than I dare even now to own he deserved. And on all the topics dwelt upon in our little afternoon chats, one was interdicted or studiously shunned—the deep-graven ineffaceable past.

CHAPTER III.

PREPARING THE MINE.

It became a customary thing to expect a visit from Colonel Hollingston in the course of the afternoon; he had taken quite an interest in the progress of the model for decorticating wheat, and attentively watched all my husband's experiments. The little change which this made to the old gentleman evidently benefited him, and there were times even when his brisk pomposity and his stately etiquette reminded me of earlier days, before misfortune had shaken his brain so much. Miss Hollingston herself objected to the frequency of her father's

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visits, and feared that they might trouble me or my husband. She gave voice to her objections at last, and George Keldon immediately responded.

"He don't trouble me at all, Miss Hollingston," said he, looking up from his model; "he's as quiet as a lamb, and these little wheels and sieves serve to amuse him. I had a father once something like the Colonel in his way, so I know exactly how to manage him. Besides, you don't know how handy he is!"

Although Miss Hollingston was unaware of that fact, it was no secret to me; for George had told me somewhat ruefully that yesterday when his back was turned, his military friend, as he called him, had upset the whole of the machinery, and broken fifty things which it would take a week to set right.

"But he takes up so much of your time—I have no right to constitute you his keeper, and bid you take care of him. If you would allow me to pay a little something," she faltered forth hurriedly; "for

I can work so much quicker now, and—”

Miss Hollingston read the expression on George's countenance very correctly, for she stopped.

“When I'm in want of money,” said he, with quiet dignity, “I *may* ask payment for a common kindness—that time hasn't come yet, Miss Hollingston.”

“I—I beg your pardon—I hope I have not pained you?”

“No,” said George; “I am not a sensitive plant, and my feelings don't shrink at a touch. May I give you one little word of advice, though?”

Miss Hollingston, humble and submissive inclined her head.

“You have high friends and connections though you do not choose to seek them out, my wife tells me,” continued he. “You may be amongst them in your proper sphere some day,—with relations in the peerage, I don't see why you shouldn't?”

“No!” she interrupted, almost fiercely.

“If you should by some chance go back to greatness, Miss, perhaps you will tell the

'stuck-ups' to remember that money don't go with us quite so far as they imagine; that many an honest workman would prefer their sympathy—something to show he is a fellow-man in their eyes—before their sovereigns. I speak for a class I hardly belong to now, perhaps; but its none the less true for that. I speak, too, without any intention of throwing off in return for your offer—it only put me in mind of something I have often thought about."

"Rich and poor are two classes that do not understand each other very well, I fear," said Miss Hollingston; "but when I talked of payment I was conscious of my own poverty—even of my woman's pride, which *you* do not seem to understand either, Mr. Keldon."

Despite this little interchange of civilities, Miss Hollingston and my husband became better friends; the Colonel came every afternoon without being charged for, and his daughter made no further offer of remuneration.

"I can't say he isn't a trouble," Keldon

once confessed to me; "that he don't make me feel sometimes nearly as silly as himself with his horse-racing anecdotes, the point of which he never remembers; but I can work with him, and it is a relief for that poor high-spirited girl, and gives her time to work or go shopping. I wish the old boy wouldn't call me Bellman though, as if I dealt in muffins, or went out 'dust-a-hoy-ing!'"

It often struck me entering the room, what a strange couple they were—what a strange contrast they presented to each other. Entering at any time they were a study—more often than not a picture; Keldon at his work planning, rivetting, or constructing his model with hands as light of touch as a woman's, all the earnestness and power of his nature expressed in his bronzed features, and all the determination to get the mastery over his difficulties, visible in the sharp Tresdaile look; Colonel Hollingston staring in a bewildered manner at the work, sitting bolt upright in his chair, and grateful to his companion for a word or glance.

They quite understood each other — that strong, vigorous mind and the weak one ; and he who had led his regiment in India, swearing at every man in it, was now controlled by a word. When the Colonel was more than usually talkative and Keldon wished to think over his plan, a "Hold hard, old gentleman" stopped the story at its most exciting point, until a nod, and a "Now then," gave permission to proceed.

One afternoon baby being asleep, I was sitting for company's sake in the workshop, wherein Keldon having just called his weak-minded friend to order, was holding his head between his hands and intently surveying the model. It was near completion at last, and the idea stood before him almost perfect.

"I suppose I can't help you, Mr. Bellman?" was the Colonel's inquiry, after five minutes' silence.

"Only by keeping your mouth shut," said George, rather roughly, almost too roughly he considered; for he turned his eyes from the Decorticator and looked at the Colonel again.

"Tell us about India—the battles you've had, and the niggers you've licked."

"I can't remember," was the answer; "I know I did go to India, though. I'll bet ten to one in fives upon it. Emily can prove it."

After a moment's reflection his face lighted up, and one of those sudden returns to his old self made a new man of him.

"Bellman, my dear fellow," said he, briskly, "did I ever tell you how I lost seven thousand pounds trying to buy the Derby favourite?"

"And swindle the British public?" added Keldon.

"Well, it was next door to swindling, I think now," said the Colonel; "but then the public was very foolish to bet on things it knew nothing about. Let me see, young what's-his-name arranged it all; he dragged me into it with his 'it's sure to succeed, my dear Hollingston,' and head first to the devil we both went when it didn't. He was an artful customer, that Bloyce."

"Bloyce!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, that was his name—ha! ha! how pat it came out for once," he cried; "my head is getting much stronger; six weeks ago I couldn't have managed that name so easily. Emily will be very pleased to hear I'm getting better."

"And this Mr. Bloyce?" I said.

George Keldon came out with his customary "Hold hard!" and checked the Colonel's response.

"It won't do, Barbara," said he, gravely; "it's not our place to hear that story."

"You are right, George," was my answer.

"Don't look so dull, my dear; it may be a story very much to your brother's credit, or the poor old fellow," in a lower tone, "may have confounded some other name with Bloyce's. He even forgets, you see, your relationship to Andrew."

Before I could reply there was a light tap at the door, and before the summons could be attended to, there was a pretty face looking into the workshop.

"May I come in, Mr. Keldon—or is it against the rules?"

"Pray, come in, Miss Tresdaile; you will find I have company already."

I had risen from my seat by the window, and was hastening to meet Alice with the intention of stopping a recognition painful to more than one. But I was not quick enough for Alice Tresdaile; she had flown towards Colonel Hollingston with all her old impulsiveness.

"Oh! I am so glad to see you, Colonel," she cried, extending her hands; "it is so long since we were at Hastings together! I have often wondered why Emily has been so silent, although I have been too offended—much too offended—to write and ask the reason. Will you tell her I am very cross with her, though I want to make it up and confess all my secrets? Will you tell me whether you are still in Eaton Square, or—?"

Alice stopped and looked from Colonel Hollingston to me. She had rattled on without much thought or observation, and

the truth had not flashed to her mind till the vacant look of the Colonel suggested the doubt.

"I—I hope you recollect me, Colonel Hollingston?"

He took off an imaginary hat, and murmured:—

"Miss—Miss—?"

"Tresdaile, your daughter's old school-fellow."

"Yes, yes—that's all right. I don't often forget faces, it's only names that puzzle me—my mind's strong enough yet, Miss Tresdaile," repeated the Colonel. "Oh! yes, I recollect you very well, now; you're the young lady who was to come into her grandmother's property, seventy or eighty thousand pounds it was considered worth—what a heap of money!"

"You remember me at Hastings?"

"Yes, and the old lady, too, in the fur tippet—hooked-nosed old lady—oh! Lord, she was a one—er! Ah! Miss Tres—Tresdaile," he said, with a jerk, "if you had remained much longer at Hastings I should

have made you Mrs. Colonel Hollingston—but it's better as it is, *now!*"

Alice coloured and glanced towards me. The remark brought up many a past scene, accused me, too, for I had doubted those attentions of the Colonel which Andrew had been the first to discover. Still, Alice was very happy, and could afford to jest upon the subject now. She tossed her ringlets back and gave one of her pleasant rippling laughs.

"And you would have made me a good husband, I am sure, Colonel—and we should have been a very happy pair!"

"Why didn't you propose to her before she came to London?" said George; "nothing like striking while the iron is hot; haven't you learned that lesson yet, Colonel? See what procrastination has done for you—here's Miss Tresdaile going to marry some one else."

"*Whom?*" cried Colonel Hollingston, in an excited manner.

"Hollo, there!" exclaimed George; "steady, Colonel, steady!"

"I have a right to know who stands between me and my last hope—my very, very last hope in this world!"

"I'm blest if he's not getting the steam up," said Keldon, in a lower tone to me; "here's a raving fit coming on for twopence. Take the baby to the top room of the house, Barbara, and send for Miss Hollingston at once. She manages him best in talk, and I can keep his taste down for kicking out behind. Miss Tresdaile—cousin, you had better follow Barbara."

"Who is it?" roared the Colonel; "Mr. Bellman, if you don't inform me, I'll order the regiment to charge the 'corticator!"

"He's a brother-in-law of mine—you have never seen him, you don't know him—sit down, old gentleman, and take it coolly."

"Her money, sir, would have raised me back to greatness," cried the other; "and now your brother-in-law—curse him from the crown of his head downwards!—robs me of my right. Your brother-in-law—why, that's—" he looked from me to my husband wildly— "that's somebody I know, isn't it?"

"Of course not," said George, bluntly.

"You lie, sir!"

"True enough," said George, reddening;
"and even a madman has a right to call me
to order. Barbara, do take Miss Tresdaile
away!"

Alice and I left the room, Alice pale and
affrighted at the sudden change in the poor
old Colonel's demeanour. I sent my maid
next door immediately for Miss Hollingston,
and then Alice and I sat down in the parlour
and awaited her arrival.

"Poor Colonel Hollingston," said Alice;
"I did not expect to find so great a change
in him at our next meeting, and I am very
sorry that that meeting should have so
terribly excited him. I do not exactly under-
stand it yet."

"Nor I."

"Perhaps Emily will explain. We were
such confidants once, and had no secrets
from each other. Barbara, dear," said Alice,
"have they had losses?"

"Heavy ones, I fear."

"And are living—"

"Next door."

"But what has become of their property—of the Colonel's pension—of all their friends?"

"Miss Hollingston has not informed me," I replied; "and, Alice, I would not advise you to inquire. Nay, more, if you will excuse me, dear, I would not see Miss Hollingston."

"Not see her, Barbara!"

"It would save her much pain—perhaps humiliation."

But Alice was proof against persuasion, and I knew her nature too well to believe I could change her determination, even though I attempted the task. There was but little time allowed me for entreaty; scarcely a minute had elapsed before Miss Hollingston came hurrying, without bonnet or shawl, into the parlour.

"Is he so very ill again, Mrs. Keldon?" she cried; "and I was hoping for the best this morning, and—"

She turned, and her large dark eyes took in the figure of Alice Tresdaile standing

facing her. She did not start, or betray any perceptible agitation; save by the faintest tinge of red that mounted to her face a moment and then vanished, one would not have judged that Alice's appearance had disturbed her. Alice had started forward with extended arms, but the tall, unbending figure of Miss Hollingston, and the repellent stately air she had assumed, would have deterred one even more impulsive than Miss Tresdaile.

Alice's heightened colour betrayed her sense of the check she had received. She stopped and faltered forth,

"Emily!"

"This is a surprise, Miss Tresdaile," said Miss Hollingston; "situated as I am, I regret I cannot say an agreeable one."

"Surely, the sympathy of a true friend
——"

"Miss Tresdaile will pardon me if I do not rank her amongst my true friends," was the cutting rejoinder; "if there have even been times when I have classed her with the false ones."

Alice drew herself up proudly, and the colour deepened on her face.

"Let me acknowledge, Miss Tresdaile, that those latter times I speak of were soured by disappointment, and that many thoughts therein were cruel and unjust. We women do not always think like heroines, when the world turns a frowning face towards us."

"Miss Hollingston is strangely altered," said Alice; "she will not hear a word in explanation or defence."

"Is there anything to explain or defend?"

"Nothing!" said Alice, pettishly.

"You must allow me to withdraw, then," Miss Hollingston observed; "I am pressed for time, and there is a painful task before me."

The pride of Alice Tresdaile had been severely mortified; her offers of friendship had been thrust aside, and she stood in the recess of the window shaking with indignation. She advanced a step nearer to Miss Hollingston, as the last words of her friend

of the past were uttered, and said with her characteristic impetuosity :—

“Miss Hollingston has fulfilled the painful task of insulting me—of proving how words of affection, acts of kindness, offers of service, should be valued between two foolish girls.”

Miss Hollingston looked at Alice for a moment in a curious, searching way, took in the small perfect form trembling with passion, the little white hands clenched, the bright eyes flashing, then turned abruptly away and left the room.

“She has not learned the art of self-command,” said Miss Hollingston to me, when I stood with her in the passage; “quick to love or despise, easily flattered, easily angered—she is still the child with whom I went to school at Bath. Pray, return to her, Mrs. Keldon—do not let me keep you from your friends.”

I returned to find Alice sitting at the table, drumming her fingers on the lid of my work-box, and humming an opera air between her teeth in rather a spiteful manner.

"Miss Hollingston is as mad as her father, Barbara."

"Hush, dear!"

"Should I spare her feelings any more than she has spared mine?" cried Alice; "what right had she to talk like that, to taunt me as though I had injured her, and were glorying in the act? It's a good thing, dear, I did not lose my temper, or I might have retaliated in my turn."

"It struck me, Alice, that you were a little hasty."

"Not at all, dear," said Alice; "I was quite cool and self-possessed—I have got over my worse faults now!"

"I am glad to hear it—what an amiable little wife you will make!"

"Ah! Barbara, you are satirical," cried Alice; "I've a great mind to be offended with you, too."

"Then you *were* offended with Miss Hollingston?"

"Would not her haughty, unnatural manner have offended a saint?" cried Alice;

"just as I was going to pity and console her, too!"

"There are some people who consider pity next door to an insult."

"She would not give me time to insult her, at any rate."

"Such losses and disappointments as she has borne, Alice, affect the strongest minds, and neither you nor I can tell what she has suffered."

Alice's anger vanished on the instant.

"Yes, yes," she said, rather rapidly; "but we are not all so steady and matter-of-fact as Barbara Keldon—cannot weigh this and that together before we hazard the answer that darts to our lips. Poor Emily, so proud of her position, and with so little care or respect for those beneath it, she must indeed have felt the shock. I almost wish I had not spoken hastily—had been just a little more calm and lady-like while I was about it!"

Variable April nature of a spoiled girl, with so much goodness of heart run wild, and requiring in the future such delicate

nurture and keen appreciation, was he—Andrew Bloyce—a fitting guide? I could not help the thought even at that moment. To have Alice before me in her wild capricious moods, was to think of *him* who was to gladden or embitter her whole life.

Miss Hollingston and her father went away shortly afterwards, Miss Hollingston restraining the Colonel's excitability as well as she could by walking by his side and keeping her hand on his arm. At the street-door I met them again.

"I don't think I shall need the kind services of Mr. Keldon or yourself to-day," said Miss Hollingston, with a faint smile; "the doctor is next door by this time, and will stay with him a little while."

"If he should continue hard to manage," said Keldon, from the back-ground, "don't forget us, Miss Hollingston."

"What do you mean by hard to manage, sir?" vociferated the Colonel; "if I were a younger man, sir, you should hear from me before morning—and be winged, too, before I had done with you!"

We heard no more of the Colonel or his daughter for some hours. The doctor, or the doctor's draught, had an effect upon the disturbed mind of the old gentleman, and all was silent next door during the remainder of Alice's stay. Ernest Tresdaile came to escort his sister home in the evening, and to have a chat with my husband before departure. Andrew Bloyce had left London suddenly on important business, and was deprived for the time of the lover's privilege.

"He's the busiest of men," said Ernest, drily, "and must put Alice quite out of conceit of her own lazy brother."

"You don't sit still and do nothing, I know," said Keldon.

"No, I speculate in my way—try the funds, public companies, and so on."

"Got many shares in the Virginian Tobacco Association, Mr. Ernest?"

"Hum—not at present."

George and Ernest laughed heartily—the Virginian Tobacco Association seemed a good subject for a joke. It is easy to laugh, but it is easy to burn one's

fingers in a dozen different ways, wise* as we think ourselves.

Ernest Tresdaile and his sister had not quitted the house five minutes before Miss Hollingston, as though she had been waiting and watching for their departure, arrived.

"I hope nothing is wrong, Miss Hollingston?" cried Keldon, starting up.

"My father is better—is in a calm sleep," was the evasive answer.

Miss Hollingston sat down before the fire and looked steadily at the blazing coals, keeping her hands clasped tightly together as though she were in pain.

"I dare say you wonder what has brought me to your house again so late?" said Miss Hollingston at last.

"I trust nothing very serious."

"I trust not."

I fancied she looked irresolutely at Keldon for a moment before she turned her eyes again towards the fire; my husband thought so, too, for he rose immediately.

“Miss Hollingston will excuse me if I adjourn to the next room,” said he; “ladies are not fond of tobacco, and I must not be robbed of my pipe after supper.”

When Miss Hollingston was alone with me, she said, half apologetically:—

“I do not wish or expect you to have a secret from your husband; there is nothing I shall say to-night which you are not at liberty to repeat, however humiliating it may be to me. What I have to say, Mrs. Keldon, depends a great deal upon yourself.”

“Is it concerning anything that has happened to-day?”

“Yes.”

“Concerning Alice Tresdaile?”

“Yes.”

“You will pardon me, Miss Hollingston, but I am not Miss Tresdaile’s confidant, and can enlighten you but little.”

“Since he left your house this afternoon, my father has spoken of Miss Tresdaile—spoken in his excitement so much that is

true of the past, and so much of the past that is dark and suggestive of scheming, that a hundred doubts are torturing my mind."

Miss Hollingston laid her hand on mine—her touch was trembling and feverish.

"Before that ball at Hastings, if there were one girl I loved with all my heart, with all a sister's fondness, it was Alice Tresdaile. A selfish and worldly girl myself, mixing in a society that acknowledged not a generous thought or a warm impulse, this young schoolfellow of mine, coming again before me, speaking from the heart, fresh to the world in which I mixed, was a relief and a welcome change to me. She was so great a contrast to everybody round me, was so full of the romance that had died out of me one year after school was left behind, that I could but love her for her very innocence. It was the old times over again with her—with her alone, for I was vain and superficial to everyone beside. The ball at Hastings came, and for the first time in my life I mistrusted

her—I lost my faith in her sincerity.”

“For what reason, may I ask?”

“I found she had been playing a part, and deceiving me—feigning to me that her heart was as open as the day, and yet keeping back a secret which betrayed us both.”

“I do not understand—and yet—”

“One moment, Mrs. Keldon,” said she, her hand tightening its clasp; “pray let me finish. The accidental discovery of that secret turned my love from Alice, and from that day we drifted each her own way, and met not till this afternoon. When I parted from her I could have told you honestly there was an end to all between us; her future was not mine, her life went a different way, and we were as much separated as if the grave had parted us. I have since thought, that I made the secret which I have hinted at of too much importance in the past, that it was all over and gone, and she had learned a lesson as bitter as myself, and profited thereby. I fear, *now*, I am mistaken!”

"And you come to me to solve the riddle—can I?"

"I think so," was the reply.

"This secret, then?"

"This question first," quickly rejoined Miss Hollingston; "my father, on his return and before the doctor's arrival, raved of his wrongs—how he had been led on and deceived, and how Miss Tresdaile was going to be married to a brother-in-law of Mr. Keldon's. I learned even from his madness much that I believe true, much that has troubled me the last two years, and this answer of yours which I wait for, will clear up the remnant of the mystery, or leave all very dark indeed!"


"And if very dark?"

"Then Alice Tresdaile may be happy."

"I pray I cannot answer you."

"If it leaves her unhappy for awhile, it still saves her before the hour is too late," murmured Miss Hollingston.

Again the hand tightened its clasp, and the full dark eyes were looking into mine.



There was a struggle, a faint one with her inner self, to keep the question back, and then the red lips parted. I knew what that question would be; my fears had told me,—the old, old fears which had rushed back once again to overwhelm my hope and trust in *him*!

"Is Alice Tresdaile going to marry your brother, Andrew Bloyce?"

"She is."

"When, when did you first discover his *affection* for her?"

"At Hastings."

"You and Mrs. Tresdaile — on *that* night?"

"Yes."

She let go my hand and covered her eyes, rocked herself on her chair and moaned bitterly.

"My doing, my doing!"

"But their affection was a secret kept from you."

"Yes, yes; but they met at my house — he was my father's false friend,—they saw each other very often, and I was blind

to all his scheming. It was my own mad vanity that kept the bandage on my eyes, and he knew that, and laid his plans accordingly. Oh! Mrs. Keldon," looking up, "is it too late to foil him? You love your brother very much, but you would not sacrifice to him a young and trusting girl?"

"He does not love her, then?"

"Is there anything in the world he loves but himself?"

"Poor Alice!"

It was the echo of his own words, uttered, mayhap, when the dagger of remorse was stabbing him on the night of our reunion; when he came to talk of the young girl whose heart he had won. Did he see the future then, as "through a glass darkly"—the wife awakened to the knowledge of what he really was, with all that she had thought him shattered at her feet? Did even he at that time recoil from the picture, which in all its vivid colouring *must* come!

"Mrs. Keldon, you are crying—is it for the brother, or the brother's victim?"

"For the brother—for the one I trusted in again, in whom I fancied much of good was developing beneath the influence of a pure and honest love. The hopes are all dashed down for ever!"

"What are your hopes, your losses, to Alice's, the heiress?"

"Miss Hollingston," I cried, eagerly; "there's a faint straw to catch at even now—don't snatch it from my grasp! Alice Tresdaile will be no heiress if she weds with Andrew Bloyce—every penny of her fortune goes to her eldest cousin."

"This may surprise me, but it does not in any way strengthen my belief in your brother's honesty of purpose."

"Can he marry her for money?"

"Can he marry her for love?" cried Miss Hollingston, impetuously; "did he love both her and me at Hastings?—would he talk of love to me, and then tell her how she had won his heart?—would he, had he loved Alice honestly and truly, have ever written me a letter like that!"

She dashed a letter before my eyes—it

fell into my lap. I started up and thrust it back into her hands.

"I will not read it—I will not look at it—spare me all further proof, Miss Hollingston!"

She thrust the letter back into her bosom.

"I was an heiress when I knew him first. I was very young, he was my music-master. He would have risen by my folly, but I stepped back from the brink and took refuge in my worldly prudence and my woman's pride. When he became my father's friend—the friend who ruined him!—he still kept up his show of affection, until one weaker, better, than myself raised up a new ambition. At that time my father was in difficulties, Alice was closely watched, and there was a game to play requiring all his caution—how did he succeed?"

"We know!"

"You do not know all. What a treble game it was—with the feeble mind of an old man, with the vanity of his daughter, with

the wild thoughts of a romantic girl new to the world ;—encouraging the man to build his fortunes afresh by marrying Alice Tresdaile, and warning Alice as a friend, to be on her guard against him—in establishing thus a dangerous confidence ! ”

“ Spare me, Miss Hollingston, I wish to hear no more.”

“ Alice Tresdaile must not be his wife ! ”

“ No, no ! ”

“ She will lose all her love for him when she wakes to the knowledge of what a schemer he has been.”

“ Who is to wake her ? ”

“ I will ! We are old friends ; we two women together, both of whom have loved and been deceived in him—yes, both, Miss Bloyce !—can take comfort from each other. Alice was a dear friend of mine once, and I must save her.”

“ Alice is impetuous, and often blind to what is just and best. You will be careful, Miss Hollingston ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You will not let your own feelings—

your own pride—stand between you in an hour so bitter to that girl?”

“I will do my best.”

“I think if I accompanied you—” I began.

“No, let me go alone, Mrs. Keldon—you are the sister of Andrew Bloyce, remember!”

“Miss Hollingston,” said I; “you have owned an affection for him—”

“An affection in the past,” she answered, quickly; “nothing more.”

“You have had opportunities of judging his true character—is he so wholly bad? Say that he is weak and selfish, prone to deceive himself in every action of his life, eager to persuade himself that that is right and best which coincides with his desires—but not a villain, calculating every chance for and against his crafty schemes.”

“Is he less a villain who blinds himself to consequences, and lets cupidity stifle the faintest whispering of a better nature?—who deceives himself with the crowd of those duped and ruined at his hands? Mrs. Kel-

don, I can give no hopes of such a man—every step he takes is to a lower depth of degradation ! ”

“ Hush, hush, he is my brother still ! ”

She bent over me, drew her hands from my face, and kissed my forehead with all a woman's tenderness.

“ I did not mean to pain you by my vehemence, dear madam,” she said ; “ it is not often I lose my self-command and act like this ! I have no right to say there is no hope—God forgive me that presumption ! ”

She hastened from the room into the passage, opened the street-door and dashed back to her home, leaving Keldon to come in and share my sorrow. I had no secrets from him, and I sat at his feet and told the story of my brother's shame. He laid his pipe aside and turned his thoughtful eyes towards the fire—once or twice his broad chest heaved, as though the story were hard to listen to in quietness. He did not speak till I had finished, then he said, and for the second time that night, it was the echo of Andrew Bloyce's words :—

“Poor Alice!”

The first thought was for the woman's sorrow, not for the disgrace he might have to share with me—not for him who had disgraced himself so much! If he had but given me one hope of him; that it was not quite so black, or he so deep a schemer; that some fair motive for his conduct might appear when all was open to the light! He strove to comfort me by talking of Alice, how it was so much for the best that it had happened now, and she was saved a life of misery with a spendthrift and a gamester; but he shunned my brother's name, and in his earnest eyes I could read his thoughts of Andrew.

CHAPTER IV.

STILL PREPARING.

I WAS not left long in doubt as to the result of Miss Hollingston's visit to Stamford Street. I did not believe many hours would pass by before the heavy clouds around me would give warning of the storm. Yet, short as the time was, they were long weary hours to me, and kept me tortured with suspense. They were so hard to bear, because there was nothing out of the common way to relieve them; all went on the same as usual, although the gloom of *something to come* hung over everything. George, more from habit than inclination, went on with his

model; the baby required attention and amusement; even Colonel Hollingston, as if nothing had happened, came smiling and smirking into Keldon's workshop, and had evidently but a faint recollection of the trouble and disturbance he had been the cause of yesterday. The whole progress of that day, the mechanical way in which we went about our duties, the heaviness that oppressed us, reminded me of the time when Mrs. Tresdaile lay dead in her room in Stamford Street; and it was as though some one were sleeping the last sleep upstairs, and we, stunned by the blow, were hardly alive to the loss. And how many dead hopes were we to mourn for in the future; standing on the brink of the revelation, could we look down into the dark abyss and count the shattered relics in its depths?

Late at night—George and I had sat up as if expecting some one—Ernest Tresdaile called to see us. The shadow of coming events had not fallen heavily upon him; he regarded the discovery from a different point of view, and perhaps did not regret

it. He was not a man to keep one in suspense concerning the object of his coming; he was no sooner in a chair before the fire than he began.

"I have had a very busy and troublesome day of it," said he, briskly, as he spread his small hands before the blaze; "been here, there, and everywhere since Miss Hollingston's visit to us. You knew," his sharp black eyes turned in my direction, "that that young lady was coming?"

"Yes."

"She *did* come, with a vengeance."

"I hope she was not too abrupt with Alice."

"No, no—on the contrary, very lady-like and gentle; but she came with rather unpleasant news to Alice, and Alice—ahem!—didn't receive the news in quite so amiable a manner as I expected."

"Expected!" repeated Keldon.

"Yes, it was to be expected some such news would turn up, I think," answered Ernest, rubbing one hand over the other; "I have been preparing Alice for

the last six months, but she wouldn't take my hints. Not my fault, as you are aware."

"You don't mean to say you thought my cousin's engagement to Mr. Bloyce would end in nothing?" asked George.

"I do mean to say it, though," said Ernest, with a chuckle.

"And you have let your sister and that young chap go on talking of love and marriage, and their happy future, and meant to stand between them at the last," cried Keldon; "by Jove, I did think better of you, Mr. Ernest!"

"That young chap, as you call him, Mr. George," was the reply, "was an artful customer to deal with. If I had played the stern guardian when I was quite a stranger to Alice, by Jove, as you say, sir, his influence would have weighed down mine, and there would have followed a runaway match, and eternal misery for my sister. I let the engagement be formed, put off the day of marriage, and trusted to time to open Alice's eyes to the true

motives which influenced Mr. Bloyce. Mrs. Keldon," said he, kindly turning to me, "I am sorry to wound your feelings by alluding to your brother disrespectfully, but I am sure you are on the side of right, and will forgive me?"

"I cannot defend him, sir."

"He has not done anything so awfully wrong, that I'm aware," said Tresdaile, anxious to treat the subject lightly; "he got into a fix, and had to follow it up or own himself a humbug, that was all. I suppose," shifting his sharp little eyes to Keldon again, "*you* would not have gone to work in my fashion?"

"We all have different ways of going to work," said Keldon; "mine's straight a-head."

"There was a brick wall straight a-head," said Ernest, drily; "I had to burrow underneath it."

"Better have rapped your skull against it honestly."

Ernest laughed, and clapped his hand heartily on Keldon's knee.

"You are an honest man, Keldon, but your simple straightforwardness in this affair would have made matters worse; and when speaking out does harm, and keeping quiet is the lesser evil, I don't see the virtue of making too much noise. If we could only catch a man by hiding round the corner for him, we shouldn't rush into the middle of the road and cry, 'Stop thief!'"

"Well, I won't argue the point," said Keldon; "my wife's anxious to know the result. I have no doubt you acted for the best—go on."

But Ernest Tresdaile was not to be hurried, and would prove his line of action to be right.

"There were at first three different minds against me—each working to one end on a different principle," he continued, "and the false step you recommend, Keldon, would have set all three against me—Alice's, Bloyce's, and Bart. Tresdaile's. Why, sir, if I had not consented to that engagement, cousin Bart. seeing no chance

for him, would have contested the Will, and played the devil with Grandmother's money! All I wanted was time."

"But that time has bound up every thought of Alice's in an impossible future," I said; "has fixed her heart upon what is unworthy of its object — has cast a blight perhaps on the remainder of her life. Do you think her fifteen thousand pounds will make amends for the happiness she loses?"

"Loses by not marrying him?"

"No. loses by the long delay."

"I would rather every penny of her fortune, and my own to boot, were thrown away than see her life a misery," said Ernest, warmly; "and the delay will save her, not be the means of her ruin. Had I been against Andrew Bloyce at the outset, would she not have been his wife? Candidly, my dear Mrs. Keldon, you who know her fitful temperament, her impulsive nature better than myself, would she not have rushed at once to your brother, and thought her sacrifice to him a duty?"

What could I say, remembering her words to me on the night the Will was read?—when we stood in the parlour together and she distrusted me, and was already arming against that resistance which she fancied threatened her. It was hard to judge the line of action best for her brother; his savoured too much of the Tresdaile cunning to please either me or Keldon, but it was questionable if any bolder policy would not have led to greater trouble.

“I think this nonsense will soon die out,” said Ernest; “for I cannot believe in undying attachment, and hearts breaking for love of the unworthy. I have never been in love myself, you see—I never mean to be. I can’t understand the theory of playing the spoony.”

“Depend upon it, you were born without a mite of tenderness in you,” said Keldon.

“I hope so. Tenderness, indeed!—ha! ha!”

“But Alice?” I said, impatiently; “you

have not told us how Alice received Miss Hollingston?"

"Yes, I have," he replied; "not very amiably or kindly, if you remember, only Mr. Keldon dragged me away from the subject. Alice was very much excited at the first hint of Miss Hollingston's, would not hear her in private, insisted that I should return to my seat, for there was nothing which she wished to hear against her future husband which she could not answer before all the world."

"And Miss Hollingston?" I asked, in some doubt.

"Miss Hollingston was certainly taken aback by this defence, became less tender and more dignified—spoke of the duty she had to discharge, and less of the past affection between her and Alice — offered my sister a letter, which she tore to pieces—related how Mr. Bloyce had planned a great deal at Hastings, made love to both of them, was first attracted to Alice by rumours of Alice's expectations, and so on till Alice would hear no more, and called it all a conspiracy against him."

"Then she has still faith in him?"

"Not in her heart, I think," answered Ernest; "the axe is at the tree's root, and the tree must fall. The poor girl will not listen to a word against him yet, but the stern truth is advancing slowly, and to-morrow will bring it face to face with her. She is hoping against despair till then!"

"What is to happen to-morrow?"

"More than you will thank me for introducing here, Mrs. Keldon, for it must happen in this house."

"No, no!" cried Keldon, very red in the face with indignation; "my wife is not going to have any more of this fun—she can't stand it! This isn't a house of call for *rows*, and the first one who kicks up a noise in it and upsets my Barbara, or wakes my baby, goes head first out of the window!"

"What! the feminine gender included!" cried Ernest, whose sense of humour would flash out at unseasonable periods.

"This is not a joke," replied Keldon, shaking his head.

"And we don't intend much of a row if we can help it," added Ernest; "but, with your permission, I will explain."

"Quick as you can," said Keldon, looking at his watch.

"Before Miss Hollingston's arrival a letter had been received from Mr. Bloyce, and been answered by my sister. The letter stated your brother's intention of leaving the Eastern Counties to-morrow, and arriving at the Shoreditch Station early in the evening—being near his sister's residence, he enquired of Alice if he should meet her here, and spend an hour or two."

"He's very fond of his sister all of a sudden," remarked Keldon.

"Alice's answer was naturally in the affirmative—girls are so anxious to get to the side of the loved one."

"Don't sneer, Mr. Tresdaile," I cried; "you have succeeded in your plans—pray have a little mercy for those who come off weakest in the struggle."

"Justly reprov'd," cried Ernest; "and it is a poor triumph after all that makes

most people concerned in it miserable and out of sorts. But I have not quite finished;—in the midst of Alice's indignation, she told Miss Hollingston of the appointment for the morrow, and asked her, if she meant her well and were not actuated by malice, to meet her and her lover in this house; to give that lover his right to explain away all misconstruction, and answer—as she was sure he would bravely—the charges brought against him."

"And will Miss Hollingston come?"


"She would give no decisive reply. She had come for Alice's good, and been treated like an enemy—she would consider whether her duty or her dignity demanded such a painful step."

George Keldon whistled meaningly.

"Well, I must say it is very kind to pitch upon this house as the battle-field for all your grievances—I suppose there is no help for it, Barbara?"

"The sooner ended now—the better for all."

"Miss Hollingston is not jealous, is she?"



asked Keldon; "there isn't a chance that that young lady may have drawn the long bow, just a little?"

"Miss Hollingston has sacrificed a great deal for my sister, and not been thanked for it," said Ernest; "Miss Hollingston has acted like a heroine."

"Oh! you *do* believe in heroines?" said Keldon.

"And as for drawing the long bow," continued Ernest, not heeding his remark, "she has screened Andrew Bloyce more than he deserves."

When Ernest Tresdaile was standing, hat in hand, at the door, he said, reluctantly:—

"I don't like to tell you all, but it will come out to-morrow, if Andrew Bloyce thinks himself an injured man and grows eloquent over his wrongs."

"Oh! leave it till to-morrow, then," said my husband, with a glance towards me.

"No, no," I hastened to reply; "let me have nothing hanging over my head that I am not prepared for—tell me, Mr. Tresdaile!"

George was still anxious to defer it, and Ernest still reluctant.

"Is it so very bad?"

"No, Mrs. Keldon," answered Ernest; "but it destroys his every chance, even with Alice—and certainly shows his calculating spirit."

"Tell me?"

"I saw Mr. Bartholomew Tresdaile to-night, and took the liberty of forestalling events a little, by informing him the match was broken off. Poor Bartie!—you should have seen the volcanic eruption that followed my announcement—it all came out then. The only way to get over Bart. Tresdaile is to put him in a passion—that does it splendidly!"

Ernest Tresdaile forgot the grave nature of the subject in his delight at having overreached his cousin, till he saw no reciprocity of expression on our countenances.

"And Bart. complained of how shabbily he had been treated—of the loss to him that this would be, of the ingratitude and rashness of Andrew Bloyce who had not only borrowed money of him, but was to have received five thousand pounds

from the reversion of the legacy for taking Alice off my hands. That was the agreement between them."

I turned away heart-sick. Was there hope for a brighter future in a man so studiously cruel—so lost to all sense of his own honour? Let me think no more of him, and turn to her over whose young life the shadows were advancing!

Ernest Tresdaile left us; he was not deeply miserable, he could not understand what should depress every one so much. Alice would get rid of an unworthy lover, save her fortune, find a husband of station and of higher principle. He had no fear of her strength being unequal to the shock, having little knowledge of a woman's heart, or its unfathomable depths, guessing less the wounds it takes in silence and bears unhealed to a better, juster world.

George Keldon was of a different nature, a little affected him and made him thoughtful. Brought up in a harder and less polished sphere, he had seen much of suffering, and learned from it many a lesson of

gentleness—much of forbearance, patience, kindness.

“We must make the best of it, Barbara, my dear,” said he, drawing me to his side with his strong arm; “but we must be prepared for something the reverse of cheerful. There’ll be a precious row to-morrow.”

It seemed to prey upon his mind, too, for in the middle of the night when I lay thinking still, he started out of his first sleep and sat upright in bed, saying:—

“I don’t see why we should grieve about it much—we’ve kept our consciences clear, old girl—but what a precious row there’ll be to-morrow!”

END OF VOL. II.



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